# THE SAVIOR AS ST. MATTHEW SAW HIM

HAGGENEY

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# THE SAVIOR
## AS SAINT MATTHEW SAW HIM

MEDITATIONS ON THE FIRST GOSPEL FOR THE USE OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

BY THE
REV. FRANCIS J. HAGGENEY, S.J.

*VOLUME I*

*Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham*

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# FOREWORD

The Meditations on the Gospel of St. Matthew hereby offered to Priests and Religious are an adaptation rather than a translation of a German work, entitled, "In der Schule des Evangeliums," by the Rev. Herman J. Cladder, S.J., late professor of New Testament Exegesis at the Jesuit seminary of Valkenburg, Holland, and the Rev. Charles Haggeney, S.J., spiritual director in the archiepiscopal seminary of Cologne, Germany. While following the general plan and embodying most of the subject matter found in the German work, the English work differs from it in several more or less important points. To mention only some: The meditations here given have been adapted for the use of Religious of both sexes as well as for the service of Priests and seminarians. All references to conditions which are peculiar to Central Europe have been replaced by applications which would appear to be practical for this country. Hints at details with which only students of Exegesis are familiar, have either been omitted or received a fuller explanation. The introduction on Prayer has been changed into a brief instruction on the Art of Meditating, for which chiefly the directions which St. Ignatius Loyola gives in his "Book of the Spiritual Exercises" and Fr. Bellecy, S.J., an asceti-

cal writer of the eighteenth century, in various works of his, have furnished the matter. To this has been added a rather lengthy exposition of certain points concerning the dogma of the Incarnation and the Inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures, which in an ascetical work intended only for persons in Holy Orders and students of theology, would not be necessary. Finally, points of exegesis in which the German work departs from the interpretation commonly held, have been omitted and the explanations proposed by the majority of Catholic authors, notably by the Rev. Joseph Knabenbauer, S.J., in His "Commentarius in Evangelium S. Matthaei" have been substituted.

The plan of dividing the work into seven small volumes has been retained. Since the manuscript of the greater part is already finished, it is confidently hoped that the succeeding volumes will appear within a reasonably short time.

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. FOUR METHODS OF MEDITATION

In his "Spiritual Exercises," Saint Ignatius Loyola offers seven methods of mental prayer. We can sketch but briefly four of these, which may be applied to the material in the present treatise, namely:

(1) Consideration: (2) Meditation in its absolute sense, or the Exercise of the Three Powers of the Soul, (3) Contemplation, (4) Application of the Senses.

The end and object of mental prayer is communion with God and the friends of God in Heaven or in purgatory, the Angels, the Saints, the Poor Souls. This familiar converse with God has a practical purpose, to enable us to avoid evil and to do good by the varied use of the powers of cognition and volition, which frees from faults, perfects and confirms in the practice of virtue.

### 1. *The work of the cognitive powers*

To meditate does not mean merely to reflect, to consider and to make good resolutions, but to pray. Meditation is mental prayer. All the activities of our cognitive and appetitive powers which it connotes, must culminate in a conversation with God or His friends in

the other world. Otherwise, it is only pious reflection, not prayer.

The first kind of mental prayer is "Consideration." It exhibits characteristic differences from the other three forms. Its subject is a general principle affecting our entire moral life or at least a totality of actions, not only a detached act or omission. For this reason meditations on "The End of Man," "Three Degrees of Humility," are called Considerations.

The second characteristic difference appears in the effect or fruit intended. A Consideration aims to produce or renew a deep conviction, a general tendency and disposition of mind and will, for instance an intensive and lasting realization of our dependence upon God, a permanent attitude of mind which points to creatures as means to attain our final destiny, a disposition of heart and will that directs us not to choose nor reject any creature for its own sake. As soon as we begin to apply these truths in particular Consideration becomes "Meditation" in a more restricted sense.

The Gospels are rich in subject matter for Consideration. Many passages in "Sermon of the Mount" form appropriate background for this type of mental prayer. When our Lord explains the difference between the mere external justice of the Pharisees and what will be exacted in the New Kingdom of God; when He speaks of the house built upon sand in contrast to the one founded on a rock; when He explains the nature and efficacy of grace in the parable of the vine and branches, when He pictures His disciples in the world as sheep

among wolves, He gives subject matter for "Consideration."

This fact, if borne in mind, may help us out of a difficulty. At times passages of the New Testament do not appeal to us as appropriate subjects of mental prayer, because their application on a particular day does not seem obvious. However, these truths may be translated into convictions that will control the general tendency of mind and heart, and this too is a spiritual asset.

The second form of mental prayer is the "Exercise of the Three Powers of the Soul," memory, intellect, and will, or "Meditation" in the strictest sense. Saint Ignatius does not mean that these powers are not to be employed in the other forms, but stresses their use here, as the memory and the intellect have the major part of the work, the senses and the imagination have comparatively little to do. All forms make use of the will; all forms lead to and terminate in acts of this faculty, for without them they are mere speculation, not prayer.

The function of the memory in this second method is not only to recall the subject of the meditation, but to review thoroughly the particular truth or fact in all its details. Many a meditation is a failure because the work of the memory is too perfunctory.

If we meditate upon an abstract truth, e. g., the malice of sin, a proverb from the book of Wisdom, an instruction of Christ, one of the beatitudes, the memory does not merely recall the truth of the words, but tries

to master the meaning, to explain thoroughly, to evaluate fully. We are to find comparisons and illustrations that make the truth clearer and more impressive. All this presses into service the combined activity of intellect and memory.

Parallel with this activity of the memory and interspersed with it, we have discussion by the intellect or reasoning. Here we are to answer the question: "What does this truth or this fact mean for me in my present condition?" But we must not consider it in too narrow a sense as meaning only: "What practical resolution must I make today and how can I accomplish it?" Reason is the guide of the will, which being a blind faculty, can act only under its direction. With his intellect or reason man sees the object, or in modern terminology the subject, concerning which he is to exercise his will, the different acts he can perform relative to this object and the motives pro and con.

We must always secure some spiritual profit from each point upon which we meditate. This consists in new knowledge of spiritual truths, in a deepening of our convictions, creating or strengthening proper tendencies and trends of mind, or in acts of the will. But we shall treat of this more in detail at a later stage.

The third method of mental prayer, according to Saint Ignatius is "Contemplation." He does not speak of the higher forms of prayer which are special gifts of God and cannot be learned, but of a distinct method of meditating upon facts and events in the life of Our Lord, of the Saints and our own life. This is one of the

easiest forms, very much in vogue among the laity. The ordinary method of saying the rosary, making the way of the cross, are apt illustrations. "Contemplation" consists in being present in spirit when the event, fact or mystery transpires in the life of our Divine Lord or the Saints, and reacting to the impression created. The memory aided by the imagination pictures the actions consecutively and the intellect or reason analyses their significance. We are to observe the persons, hear their words, witness their deeds. Hence the term "Contemplation," in Latin meaning the act of an interested spectator or witness.

But the imagination and memory are not the only active faculties. The intellect supplements their work. Thus in the Contemplations on the mysteries of the Sacred Passion we are counseled not only to observe the persons, hear their words, witness their actions, but also to consider what Christ our Lord suffers or wishes to suffer in His humanity, and how the Divinity conceals itself. In other words, how Christ in His torments derives no benefit from His Divine Nature except that it prevents His human nature from succumbing before all tortures have been endured; how Christ suffers all this for my sins. What will I do and suffer for Him?

In the mysteries of Christ's glorious life we consider the influence which the Divine Nature exerts upon the human nature, bestowing upon it glory and splendor, bliss and majesty, and we regard the office of Comforter which Christ Our Lord exercises, "as friends

are wont to console one another." Therefore, we shall not recall these events or mysteries as past, but picture them in the present. In presenting the points to be considered in the mysteries, Saint Ignatius uses the present tense except in verbal quotations from the New Testament. Thus, "our Lady and Joseph, her spouse, go from Nazareth to Bethlehem." In the prelude Saint Ignatius never directs the exercitant to make a mental picture of the mystery, but merely of the place or places in which it occurs. He always suggests "a composition of place, seeing the spot." In the contemplation of the Incarnation we read: "It will be our purpose to view the entire expanse and circuit of the terrestrial globe, in which divers races dwell; at the same time, to behold in particular the house and room of our Lady in the town of Nazareth in the province of Galilee."

Nor are we to be merely interested, but active witnesses. In the Contemplation on the Nativity, he specifies: "I am to see the persons, that is to say, our Lady and Saint Joseph, the Infant Jesus after His birth, *accounting myself a poor and unworthy servant, contemplating and tending* them in their necessities, with all possible homage and reverence. I shall then reflect on myself in order to derive some benefit."

"The Application of the Senses" constitutes the fourth Ignatian Method. It is akin to Contemplation, but differs from it in the superficial treatment of the mystery, by registering what one present would perceive by sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. The mental investigation of the interior nature and motivation of

the mystery is arduous after a day of hard labor; therefore the Saint always reserves this method for the last exercise in the evening. It is obvious that the work of the imagination is greater, making it easier for us to be participants in the mystery. The suggestion of Saint Ignatius to consider what Our Savior would say or do, finds application here. We imagine that we converse with Him, kneel in spirit at His feet, kiss them reverently, make ourselves His servants. Saint Bonaventure has marvelous illustrations to prove this point. To quote but one instance. "Return to Egypt, visit the Child Jesus. You probably will find Him out-of-doors among the boys. He will run to meet you, because He is kind and affable; kneel, kiss His feet and take Him into your arms for a little space. Perhaps He will say: 'We have permission to return to our country; we depart tomorrow. You have come at an opportune time, for you return with us.' Promptly you express your delight and desire to follow Him wherever He goes. Enjoy His presence amid the flow of familiar conversation. Such meditations may appear childish, but they are very profitable and lead to higher contemplation. Directly the Christ Child will present you to Mary. Salute her cordially with reverent obeisance, and the holy patriarch Saint Joseph."

We have hitherto seen the principal work of the cognitive powers. But, as stated before, meditation is not merely speculation. It is of a practical nature, a prayer not only in the colloquy which terminates it, but throughout its entire course. We exercise memory

and intellect in order to derive spiritual profit, not the least of which is to utilize the will properly.

### *2. The work of the will*

What is the special function of the will in meditating? It controls the other powers of man. It must apply the other faculties of body and soul to the subject matter. It prompts us to observe proper posture, to restrain the senses from dissipation, to concentrate the imagination and intellect upon the subject of meditation.

If we thus chance upon a truth intended to influence our lives or see it in a clearer light, the will compels the intellect or reason to assimilate it so thoroughly as to create a permanent conviction, to imprint the truth and the motives for action in the depths of the soul, to create a mode of thinking and judging according to eternal principles, to adopt the viewpoint of Christ and the Saints, to emulate His wisdom, to discard the false principles of the world and to discern the dictates of passion and human prudence.

This work of the will is very important. Without it our spirituality will not endure nor strike deep roots. Our efforts must be supported by prayer for light, for the grace of recalling the truth at the proper time and for strength to live and act in accordance with it.

The will next concerns itself in acts which refer to truths discovered by the cognitive powers. It would be

a deplorable error to infer that they consist only in practical resolutions, petitions, sorrow for past offences. This type of mental prayer may satisfy the beginner for a while, but it will soon become monotonous and ineffective. We shall append a list of acts that may be performed; this classification is not complete, but it will give an idea of the extensive work apportioned to the will. We shall observe the alphabetical order with two exceptions, acts of the theological virtues and of petition.

Every meditation should be interspersed with acts of Faith, Hope and Charity in reference to the truths of which it treats. These acts are the highest and noblest that man can elicit. The act of faith should be made not only with regard to the divine doctrines revealed in that particular mystery, but also in the facts recorded. For Sacred Scripture narrates not only abstract doctrines, but also tangible facts, e. g. that Christ healed the lepers, multiplied the loaves, walked on the waters. Modern unbelievers not only deny the divinity of Christ, but represent the inspired writings in every part and detail as myths and human inventions. It behooves us, therefore, to express our belief in them as utterances of the omniscient and truthful God.

Every word of the sacred text sets forth some aspect of God's will and desire to lead us to Heaven; thus our hope is increased and our charity inflamed. The other acts are not suitable for every meditation nor for every subject proposed to the will. The choice rests with the one who meditates.

Acknowledgment—of our dependence upon God, benefits received, etc.

Admiration—of God's attributes and works, the perfections and virtues of Christ's human nature, His works, and those of the saints.

Adoration—of the three Divine Persons.

Atonement—for insults offered to God, to Christ, for all the ignominy recorded in the particular mystery.

Confession—to God, to the Savior, the Blessed Virgin, the saints, of our sins, faults, etc.

Confidence—in God's power, mercy, providence, in the grace of vocation, other graces; in the benevolence of the saints, their intercessory power with God.

Contempt—of the world, of things earthly, comforts, honor, human respect.

Contrition—sorrow for sins, imperfections, omissions, faults.

Desire—to see God glorified, Christ and the Saints honored; to work for the glory of God, the salvation of souls, to suffer for God and for souls.
—of Heaven, for graces, union with God, union with Christ.

Detachment—from the world, relatives and friends, office, occupation, place, self.

Detestation—of our faults, passions, cowardice, selfishness, of the crimes committed against God, Christ etc.

Encouragement—by consideration of God's love, the power of His grace, the love of Christ, the influence

of vocation, the examples of others, our own past experiences.

Fraternal Charity—by making acts of virtue or by kind services.

Fear—of God's justice, His judgments and punishments in this life and in eternity; of our own weakness and instability, but without despairing or losing heart.

Gratitude—for light received in the meditation, for the virtue practiced or work accomplished by Christ in the particular mystery, His example, sacrifice, sufferings; for vocation; for the general or particular benefits received from God; for favors bestowed upon others.

Hatred—of sin, of our faults and imperfections.

Humiliation—by a humble opinion of ourselves, acknowledging our unworthiness, esteeming others more than ourselves.

Humility—in accord with the three degrees of humility to protest that we do not desire to be better off than Christ was on earth, to prefer an obscure life of discomfort to one of honor and ease.

Love of the cross—joy in trial or sacrifice imposed upon us.

Love of enemies—by a direct act or by resolving to do good to those who have offended us.

Love of vocation—by resolving to live and die in the religious state, by grateful consideration of the blessings it has procured for us and will procure in the future.

Mortification—acts of interior and exterior mortification to be performed during meditation.

Patience—in difficulties arising during meditation; or by steeling ourselves for future trials.

Protest—against injustice or insults which Christ endures in many of the mysteries.

Promise—of fidelity, loyalty; of specific acts and sacrifices, but without obligating ourselves under sin.

Purpose of Amendment.

Rejoicing—with God, with Christ, with the Saints on account of God's glory, the honor of Christ, God's love of us, the happiness of Heaven, etc.

Renewal of good intention—of promises, vows.

Resolution—in keeping with the subject of meditation.

Reverence—interior and exterior.

Resignation—to God's holy will.

Submission—to God; to superiors.

Surrender—of ourselves to God, to Christ.

Petitions—1) Object: any grace, benefit, aid in personal trouble, in the needs of others, the wants and interests of Holy Church.

2) For whom? Ourselves, friends, relatives, benefactors, superiors, enemies; for nations, countries, Christians, unbelievers, the living, the dying, the afflicted, the tempted, for those in danger.

3) To whom? God, His Angels and Saints.

4) How? By direct appeal to God, or to the Angels and saints as intercessors. Like a mendicant, approach one saint after another; sometimes make a direct request; again merely state needs.

## II—MEDITATION, A FORM OF PRAYER

Meditation is not only a spiritual exercise, but a form of prayer. By a spiritual exercise we understand any kind of activity whose object is "to prepare and dispose the soul for removal of all inordinate affections, to ascertain and fulfill the will of God in the disposition of our lives and the achievement of eternal salvation." Therefore, not only prayer, but also spiritual reading, examination of conscience, choice of a state of life, deliberation upon measures to be taken for the benefit of the soul, may be justly called spiritual exercises.

Prayer is communion, conversation with God or the friends of God in the other world. Mental prayer has these requisites, for:

It begins, ends, is inwoven with direct addresses to God and the friends of God.

All the work of man's cognitive and appetitive powers is performed in the presence of God and the heavenly court.

Meditation is an exercise of the divine presence. At the beginning we recall to mind that God is present, sees and loves us, we make an act of adoration. Saint Ignatius advises us to stand erect, to concentrate our minds on the Divine Presence, to express our reverence by bowing, by kneeling down.

The "preparatory prayer" follows: we acknowledge our unworthiness to be in the presence of God and to converse with Him; we make an act of confidence in

His goodness and mercy, entreat the assistance of His grace, that all our thoughts, works, actions may be for His greater glory.

The "Preludes" are next in order. For to the meditations of the New Testament contained in this work we have three preludes: "The history," the "composition of place," the "petition." In the first prelude or the history we recall in brief the event or the words of Our Savior. In the present work this is contained in the scripture text at the head of every meditation or in the general outline immediately following the gospel passages.

The second prelude consists in a "composition of place," "seeing the spot." We picture to ourselves the place or places which constitute the scene of our Lord's action or sermon, or of the event which forms the subject of meditation.

The purpose of this prelude is to focus the attention of the mind and chiefly of the imagination. We transport ourselves in spirit to the place in the Holy Land where the event occurred. In the meditation on The Nativity of Christ, for instance, "we are to see with the mind's eye the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem; to consider its length, width, whether it is level, through valleys or over hills. We shall likewise inspect the cave, large or small, high or low, how it is prepared." We are to forget temporarily our local habitation, to live in the place consecrated by the presence of the Savior.

The third prelude is a petition for benefits we wish to derive from the meditation. The reader of these

volumes will find suggestions at the end of the general outline, prefacing each meditation.

Meditations are prayers also in their development, or in the application of the powers of the soul to the mysteries themselves, for several reasons:

We meditate in the conscious presence of God. We do not investigate these sacred subjects like professors and students of exegesis, who study the inspired text for the purpose of information, nor as preachers preparing or writing sermons, but with a constant sense of reverence and devotion towards God Who is present, or the saints who are looking down upon us from Heaven. We are not to act like a physician who makes a diagnosis of the symptoms of a patient that he has visited or of whom he has received a report, but we are to be like the mother anxiously and attentively watching at the bedside of the sufferer.

The work is interspersed with frequent aspirations, salutations, petitions, prayers to God or the Saints. Above all, the acts of the will are to be made with greater reverence.

Moreover, meditation is prayer because we must listen to the voice of God and be in a receptive mood for the lights and inspirations He may deign to give. It is said that in meditation we preach to ourselves. This is true only in part. It does not mean that we are to do all the mental work with uninterrupted sequence of thought, but we must also hearken to the words of our Lord and at times, mindful of His presence, assume an attitude of expectancy. It does mean that we shall admonish and

encourage ourselves, employ self-interrogation, and make a colloquy with our own soul.

Finally, meditation is prayer because it must always end with one or more colloquies. Every colloquy consists of two parts: a prayer to God or the Saints, or a conversation with them based upon the subject matter of meditation or the lights received during its progress and couched in words of our own choosing: secondly, a vocal prayer, recitation of the Our Father, the Hail Mary, Soul of Christ, etc.

The first part of the colloquy is not intended to be mere petition. "The colloquy is made properly by speaking as friend to friend, or as a servant to a master; now asking a favor, again censuring oneself for evil done, giving information about one's affairs in quest of counsel."

It is indeed appropriate in a colloquy after a meditation on a mystery in the life of our Lord, to thank Him for what He has done or suffered for mankind in general and for us in particular, for the opportunity and the ability to make this meditation; to ask the grace not only to live and act in accordance with the instructions received, but to recommend to His keeping Holy Church and the entire world.

### III. THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AS A BOOK FOR MEDITATIONS

1) THE HOLY SCRIPTURES CONTAIN THE WORD OF GOD. Inspired by Him the sacred writers have put down

only what God wanted them to write and given their works to the people of Israel or to the Church of Christ as the Word of God, Who in one way or another rendered those to whom the inspired pages were addressed, certain that they were really what they pretended to be, divine communications addressed to man.

In prayer we seek to converse with God and above all with the God-Man. Conversation consists in the mutual utterance of thoughts, and when it is impossible to do so by word of mouth, we make use of writing. God adopted this method of communicating with man by giving us the Sacred Scriptures, this "epistle of God addressed to mankind." It is true that God, in making use of the services of men as His secretaries in composing these books, did not dictate to them the precise words which they were to put down. He gave them the ideas and while they had to use their own minds in expressing those ideas in words, He allowed them considerable freedom; nevertheless, He constantly saw to it that they wrote only what He wanted to be written, expressed these ideas correctly and properly, and adapted their mode of expressing themselves to the capacity of their readers or hearers. Therefore, they had to follow the style and the mode of speech prevalent among them. God did not intend to teach sciences, grammar or artistic composition in His communications to mankind, but only heavenly truths. Therefore, He permitted His secretaries to use expressions which masters of style and composition may criticise and which professors of the sciences may declare to be incorrect. The Scriptures

speak about the sun rising, setting, moving around the earth, to designate phenomena which we observe every day, without thereby implying that the occurrence is described in accordance with its true nature. As nobody takes offence at astronomers when speaking about sunrise, sunset, being in the zenith, etc., so only ignorance and malice can object to the Sacred Writings and their divine authorship on the score of scientific inaccuracy. When we say, for instance, that St. Matthew had such and such a purpose in writing his gospel, that he grouped his matter in such and such a way, we must always bear in mind that he did so under the direction of God, Who wanted the work to be composed precisely for this purpose and in this manner.

Moreover, when St. Luke says of himself that he carefully interviewed those who knew the Lord in His mortal life, and that he consulted other documents for the composition of his gospel, we must be aware of the fact that God directed Him in all this work in order to let him find the truths which the omniscient and all-truthful Being wanted to tell mankind in this account of the life and passion of the Savior, and that his gospel contains only what the divine Author intended to communicate to us.

While the original is thus truly a divine work, its translations are the work of man who is fallible. In order to be certain about the correctness of the translation, we must appeal to the infallible teacher of all divine revelations, the Church of Christ. Hence the absolute necessity of the regulation made by the Church,

that her children read only such versions as have been approved by her.

The Church in her general councils, and above all at the Council of Trent, gave her approval to only one version, the so-called Latin Vulgate, and for good reasons she has limited even this approval to this fact that the Vulgate gives the substance of the original text correctly and that it contains no error in matters concerning faith and morals. But the decree does not assert that the translation is the best, that there is no place in it in which the original is not translated somewhat ambiguously and obscurely, that consequently translations made of the Vulgate into modern languages, though very literal, can not convey a wrong meaning. Even the Vulgate, in order to be translated correctly, must be compared with the Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic of the original.

Moreover, the Sacred Council has not defined that the Vulgate contains none of the interpolations or glosses which the first translators and copyists of the Bible occasionally added to the text. However, all the additions contain true doctrine. Thus, to give only one instance, the Greek text of St. Matthew has: "till she (Mary) brought forth her son," while the Vulgate says: "till she brought forth her *first-born* son." The little addition of the word "first-born," does not state an untruth, since Jesus is really her first-born son.

These remarks are made to obviate a difficulty that might otherwise arise when, for the purpose of getting the full and clear meaning of a text, we refer to the

Greek. But let us state right here that these little additions and these ambiguities concern only a comparatively few places and present no real difficulty against our faith in the Bible.

2. THE BIBLE CONTAINS LESSONS FOR EVERY SITUATION IN LIFE. We have said above that God in the Sacred Writings addresses an epistle to mankind. This manner of communicating with us was in a way necessary for God, but it is absolutely unnecessary for us when we wish to communicate with Him; for He hears and sees us all the time and He understands even the unspoken word of our heart. We, however, must consider ourselves happy to be able to listen to Him when He addresses us through the Scriptures.

Therefore, when we wish to converse with the invisible God, it is but natural to receive His written word and in answer directly pour out our hearts to Him who though invisible, nevertheless is not far from us; for "in Him we live, and move, and are" (Acts 17,28).

We practice mental prayer in order to be taught, admonished, consoled, warned, encouraged by God. We wish to find the right road that will lead us to Heaven, to walk it indefatigably and even cheerfully. We wish to be guarded against missing the right direction, losing strength and falling by the wayside.

The Apostle tells us: "All scripture, inspired by God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work" (2 Tim. 3,16). Therefore,

whatever we may expect as the fruit of a true life of prayer, we can find in the Sacred Scriptures if only we know how to use them profitably.

We can hardly think of any situation, condition or experience in life for which the Holy Book does not offer light, direction, consolation, admonition. Considered as a whole, it is the best record of God's mercy and love; for it contains the best account of the history of divine revelation, both the part God has taken in it, and the part man has had in it, the response of mankind to God's love and mercy. On one side, we behold the condescension and love, the power and wisdom which God manifests for our redemption; on the other, we find the weakness of man and the dangers threatening him on the road to Heaven.

Considered in its details, it contains the most magnificent instructions and examples, instructions about God and the world, virtue and vice, duty and hope; examples to be imitated and examples to be avoided, examples strengthening our hope or buoying us up in sufferings and examples filling us with holy fear. No book on earth teaches as impressively as the Bible and at the same time as succinctly. For not man, but God is speaking in it to our heart and His "word is more piercing than any two-edged sword" (Hebr. 4,12).

3. THE OLD TESTAMENT. Not all parts of the Sacred Scriptures are equally intelligible and of an equally immediate practical use for us. This truth is to be borne in mind, above all with reference to the Old Testament. The books of the Old Testament were primarily

addressed to a people that was expecting the coming of the Redeemer and had the duty of preparing both itself and the world for His coming. We, on the contrary live since His gracious arrival, and part of our work is to spread the Kingdom that He has established on earth. The "addressees" of the Old Testament were Orientals whose minds and language differ from ours in many points.

However, greater than these are the differences caused by two other factors. Since the coming of Christ the relation of God to the world, above all to those who have accepted Christ's teaching and become members of His Kingdom, is entirely different from the relations which prevailed until then. After the fall mankind stood to God merely in the relation of the creature to the Creator. A more intimate relation was established between the people of Israel and Yahweh on Mount Sinai, when God made a covenant with them, chose them as His people and made them His servants. Their relation to God was that of servants to a kind master. "Slavery" St. Paul called it often enough, but it is the "ideal," kind slavery, similar to the relations that existed between the kind slave-owners of our so-called border states and their slaves. But in the New Law we have become "Children of God"; God is our Father and we are His children and the brothers of Christ. We have received "the freedom of the children of God." The Old Covenant was the covenant of fear and of externals, the New is that of love and of the spirit. Some

of the meditations in this volume will offer a further explanation of this.

The second radical difference between the Old and the New Testament consists in the divine revelations accorded to mankind. St. Paul emphasizes this when he says: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days hath spoken to us by his Son" (Hebr. 1,1.2). All the revelations which God vouchsafed to mankind before Christ, are very far from the completeness which characterizes the revelations of Christ. God made known to the people who lived before the Savior comparatively few truths, and even those He revealed gradually in the course of thousands of years and not with that clearness which is the prime characteristic of the Christian revelation.

Hence it is not easy to understand correctly all that is contained in the books of the Old Testament without consulting the New, which it prepares and foreshadows.

4. THE NEW TESTAMENT. "Of his fullness we all have received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1,16.17). In these words St. John summarizes all that may be said about the difference between the two testaments. Christ not only brought us all the graces which God decreed to bestow on the world, and all the means by which they are to be obtained, but He also revealed all the truths which God intends to make known to man. No other and no further revelation will

ever be made. Hence the Apostle says; "Other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 3,11). And he explains this at greater length in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 12,22–29). No private revelation made to a saint can ever become an article of faith for the Church. The apostles indeed were favored with some revelations after Our Lord's glorious Ascension, but these revelations concerned only the doctrine they had heard from the mouth of Christ and the directions He had given them. St. Paul received all the knowledge of what he had to preach by direct revelation, but this too concerned only the truths that Christ had preached.

However, Christ when preaching here on earth was not permitted to tell mankind all He knew about God and the supernatural world. He had to make known only what the Father commissioned Him to reveal. Now, it is a characteristic mark of the revelations which the Savior was commanded to make, that they have a distinctive reference to Jesus Himself. Hence the apostles call their work of instructing the world in the truths of Heaven "preaching the Lord Jesus." St. Paul summarizes it when he writes to the Corinthians: "I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2,2). And yet he had the sacred duty to announce to them all that Christ had taught and he certainly was not remiss in fulfilling it.

The end and purpose of all the work of the apostles was to sanctify the world. The Holy Ghost Himself tells

us through the same apostle that this consists in forming Christ in the souls of men: "My little children, of whom I am in labor again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4,19). He calls it also to make men imitate Christ.

To preach Christ's doctrine and to urge men to imitate the example Christ has given in His mortal life, is the work of the apostles as we find it described in "The Acts of the Apostles"; and this is the purpose for which they wrote the "Epistles" of the New Testament. They are convinced that their own personal sanctification and the sanctification of their flock consists in this imitation of Christ. Christ they hold up as the model for all, and no other. If St. Paul urges the faithful of Corinth, Philippi and Thessalonica to imitate his own example, he immediately adds as reason that he is but copying Christ's example: "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 4,16). The same idea is expressed in the Epistles of St. Peter.

While the "Acts" and the "Epistles" of the apostles have Christ for their subject, they do not give us a complete picture of His life, His deeds, His virtues, sufferings; nor do they report any of His wonderful sermons. This is done in the four Gospels. In them we see the God-Man living and acting, as He was seen by those who accompanied Him and were admitted to His intimate companionship. The picture they draw, or rather which the Holy Ghost through them paints of the Savior, is such that no human inventiveness could

ever have designed or human tongue expressed it. We have romances and novels composed by believing authors and based upon the Gospels, but not one of them can approach even remotely the sublimity and simplicity of the accounts of the Evangelists. No wonder, these authors produce a human work, the Gospels were dictated by the Holy Ghost.

5. THE SCOPE OF THE GOSPELS. Each of the four Evangelists, whilst having much in common with the other three, has also much matter not related by the others, and thus one supplements the others. This has given rise to the project of collecting all the data given by them into one account, thus composing a history of the life, the work, the virtues, the passion and the glorification of the Savior. The idea is by no means a new one, but was carried out already in the first century after the appearance of the gospels. Today we possess such "harmonies of the gospels" in practically all the languages of the civilized world. Besides this, we possess in all the languages of the world that have a printed literature, "Lives of Christ" based on the harmonies of the gospels. Meditation books are commonly based on such harmonies. The value of such works certainly must not be underestimated; but it must also be confessed that they have one great inevitable inconvenience.

Each evangelist, or rather let us say, the Holy Ghost inspiring His work, had a special end in view and followed a particular plan in his composition. He wishes the reader to consider the life of the Savior from a particular point of view and so he brings out special

traits in His character and in His work. He chooses so to speak special colors, distributes the lights and the shadows in a particular way to bring out these points. Very important in this plan is the context in which the respective incidents are told, and the grouping in which they find their place. It is an admitted fact that the evangelists do not always follow the chronological order, but group together under the guidance of the Holy Ghost doctrines of the Savior and incidents of His life which enable us to ascertain the special point the Divine Author wishes to make. Thus, for example St. Matthew in the eighth and ninth chapters of his gospel wishes to prove the Messianic dignity of Christ by the miracles He worked and for this purpose relates a whole series of cures and other miracles which according to St. Luke, who follows the chronological order more closely, happened at different times.

The context is, above all, very important for a correct understanding of certain doctrines of Our Lord and the intention He has in giving certain parables. Thus, to quote only one instance, the parables of the laborers in the vineyard, of the seed that fell on different ground, can not be understood properly without paying close attention to the context in which the evangelist places them.

St. Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of the Savior, which he traces from Abraham down to Joseph, the husband of Mary. St. Luke on the contrary, narrates the generations of Christ only after the account of His baptism and traces them back from

Christ to Adam and God. There is a purpose in all this. Matthew and Mark, Luke and St. Paul describe the institution of the Blessed Sacrament at the Last Supper, but in such a way that the former two lay special stress on the miracle of transubstantiation, the latter two on its sacrificial character. St. Mark speaks principally about the work of Christ in Galilee, St. John of His work and manifestations in Judea and above all in Jerusalem. Matthew brings out more the proofs of His Messianic dignity, John those for His divinity. All that the Savior taught about the deep mysteries of the Trinity, spiritual regeneration and the nature of supernatural grace, is recounted by the fourth gospel with a completeness which is totally absent in the others, while the first stresses above all the point that all the prophecies concerning the Messias are fulfilled in Christ. Luke exhibits Him more as the Savior not only of Israel, but of the entire world, while Matthew considers Him more in His relations to the Jews. The first gospel is rich in its expositions of the Kingdom of God and the reason why Israel has lost it, the third gospel describes Him as the Priest-King of the world.

Therefore, a book of meditations based on one gospel only can not be useless. Among other advantages it offers an opportunity of gaining a knowledge of Christ, His character, His work from a picture that has been drawn not by man, but by the Holy Ghost Himself, and one in which we are enabled to devote our attention to every line and every word of the inspired account. Let us, therefore, in the following meditations adhere to

the words of St. Matthew as closely as possible. By doing so we shall gain another advantage; for we shall be able to make full use of another expedient which the evangelist employs to place a living picture of the most amiable among the sons of men before our eyes, namely of briefly summing up at the end of a division the point which he has been at pains to make.

6. The Division into Chapters and Verses. For those of the readers of this work who have not made exegesis or the explanation of the Sacred Scriptures a special study, it will not be amiss to add here one other remark. The division into chapters and verses which we now find carried out in the writings of the New Testament, was not made by the sacred authors but introduced at a later date. While on the whole it is logical and correct, at times it is rather mechanical. Here and there the parts of one and the same sentence are torn asunder by commencing a new verse before the sentence is completed. On a few occasions even the division into chapters is marred by beginning a new section or chapter before the subject matter is closed, so that one or two sentences of the new chapter must be drawn into the preceding one. We also find that at times a chapter is continued when the introduction of an altogether new subject should necessitate a new division. The Church herself in her use of the Bible, above all in her liturgy, does not follow the division we now find in the complete texts. Thus the gospels of the Mass are selected without any regard to it. While, therefore, we wish to treat the customary division of chapters and verses with

great reverence, we are justified in not binding ourselves to it slavishly.

We shall cite the sacred text as it is in our Douay editions of the Bible, but mindful of what has been said about the translations of the Word of God, where the text of the Latin Vulgate and the English version recognized by the Church are obscure and, in the case of the Douay version even not quite correct, we must claim the privilege of adding a more exact translation according to the Greek text. In the case of the Douay version, this is all the more necessary since the meaning of numerous words in English as in every other living language, has changed in the course of time.

### IV. TRUTHS CONCERNING THE INCARNATION

In order to derive full benefit from the meditations on the life of our Savior we must bear in mind some of the truths concerning the Incarnation.

1) The Hypostatic Union. Christ, on becoming man was "made like us in everything, sin only excepted." This truth is at times not so fully understood as it ought to be by those who make their daily meditation generally on the Life and Passion of Jesus Christ. At times a difficulty arises in their minds that those wonderful virtues practiced in His mortal career, and those beautiful traits of character manifested on every page of the Gospel, were a natural and absolutely necessary result of His being a divine person. The objection comes to them: "How could He act differently

when He was God?" This difficulty is caused by a faulty conception of the union that exists between the human and divine nature in the God-Man. They believe that it is of a similar kind as that between body and soul in man. And yet, it is very different. The union between body and soul is what the theologians call an "essential union"; that between the divine and human nature in Christ is a "hypostatic or personal union."

What is an essential union? An essential union is one in which two substances become one nature or constitute one essence. Let us explain this more in detail. When a human soul is united with a body, it transfuses so to speak life into the body. Without a soul no eye can see, no ear hear, no limb move. But when animated by a rational soul, the body is raised to a higher plane, changed in its nature, and constitutes one being with the soul, able to perform all the functions of assimilating food, growing, healing wounds, repairing losses inflicted on it, seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting.

The soul likewise receives new powers from this union. Without the body it can think and receive knowledge of things only in the way in which spirits are aware of the world, but it can neither see nor hear, nor digest and assimilate food. All this it can do only when it is so united with the body that it is in a way blended into one being with it and both together act as one being. The eye and the soul together see, hear, feel, digest, assimilate. The body is influenced by the soul

and the soul by the body. They form one nature and one essence; hence the term "essential union."

Altogether different is the hypostatic or personal union. Here one person possesses two natures so that they exist only parallel with each other, but do not pervade each other. There is neither blending nor mixture, nor does either nature receive new powers. When Christ here on earth wrought miracles, with His human nature He only spoke the word or touched the sick, but the real healing He performed with His divine nature, or rather since no Divine Person can act alone, it was He with the Father and the Holy Ghost who performed the miracle. Christ, says the Athanasian Creed, "is one not by the mixture of substance, but the unity of the Person." It is the person who possesses or has a nature. We say of ourselves that we *have* a body and soul, that we have a human nature, but that we *are* persons. The person is the possessor, the owner of the nature, but the person can not use his nature except in accordance with the qualities of that nature. Now as Christ is God because He has the divine nature, He is a man because He has also a human nature with all the qualities that belong to it and all the limitations that go with it.

The words "person and personality" in common parlance are as a rule used not in the original philosophical and theological sense, but in a derived or wider signification. We do not use them here in any but the philosophical or theological meaning. We understand by personality that by which an intelligent being is a per-

son. And by a person we understand one that is the owner of a nature and of all that is done by and to this nature. We say for instance that Christ, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, was crucified. What does this mean? It means, to use a very crude expression, that "the owner" of that terrible suffering with all its pain was the Eternal Son of God. It was He who felt that torture, and the means, so to speak, with which He felt it, was His human nature. The Son of God touched the blind man and cured him. The owner of that action of touch is the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. And because He is a person, Christ possesses also the divine nature, owns it, has it as His own.

The personality also renders one distinct from everybody else and one's own master in a physical sense, "for oneself," as the scholastics say. A person can never be a part of another reality. Because we are persons, each one of us is in a way for himself, though he is subject to God and other lawful authorities. But we need not consider this here.

Now let us draw the conclusion from these rather subtle explanations. In the hypostatic union of the divine and human nature by means of the personality of the Son of God, the divine and the human nature in Christ exist parallel to each other, but so that no power flows from the divine into the human nature. Christ in His mortal life needed everything that we need, and God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost had to give it to Him in the same way as to us except that

His human nature did not suffer from sin and its degrading effects.

The degrading effects of sin are concupiscence or the want of control of the passions, the result of which is the liability to be tempted from within one's nature because the feelings often arise in us unbidden and against our will. Another consequence of this is the blindness of our intellect and liability to error, and the weakness of the will caused by the difficulties created by the passions. From all this the human nature of the Savior was free. But He was not exempt from those consequences of original sin which are not in themselves degrading, such as passibility or subjection to pain and suffering, and mortality or the law of death, except that He could not die without consenting to die. Even mortal wounds, while causing inexpressible pain, could not force His soul out of His body unless He consented to it. He did consent to it when on the cross He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

Consequently when the Savior fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert, He felt all the pangs of hunger which such a long fast entails. That He did not die was due to an influence which the Most Holy Trinity exercised on His body similar to that by which God at times sustains Saints without food.

As man He needed and received the direction of the Holy Ghost just as any other human being. On account of His mission as Messias He possessed "infused knowledge" of everything that concerned His work. With His human intellect He also saw God as the

Blessed see Him in Heaven; but this "vision of God" was restricted to what is called "the highest part of the soul," and exercised not that further influence which it does in the inhabitants of Heaven. It rendered Him neither perfectly happy nor immortal nor incapable of suffering. It did not even prevent that most terrible of all tortures of which He complained on the cross when He exclaimed: "God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And only through this vision of God did He know as man that His human nature was united with the Second Person of the Trinity and that He was God.

As man He also possessed a free will and the power to transgress, or not to comply with, the command of His Heavenly Father. For this freedom was necessary in order that He could merit. Therefore He needed the help of divine grace and had to pray for it just like other men. Consequently, His virtues are just as much the result of His free will and of His efforts as in any other human being. His kindness, patience, humility are the result of divine grace and His own free cooperation with it. He is a Saint by His own free choice just as any other Saint.

Nay more, Christ, being perfectly human, could be tempted here on earth by the devil and by other human beings, but not by evil passions that have their seat in the heart; and He had to resist those temptations. Moreover, He at times felt the difficulties of God's service. Did He not pray in the garden of Olives that He might be spared the bitter chalice? Did He not

sweat blood in consequence of the strong effort He had to make to overcome the natural resistance and fear of suffering and death? Scripture tells us distinctly that in the garden He was assailed by fear, sadness, disgust. The struggle became so great that an angel had to be sent from Heaven to comfort, strengthen and console Him. All these explanations are not pious reflections, but doctrines taught by the Church. What a wonderful light do they throw on the character of Our Savior and on many incidents in His life. Do they not show Him as most worthy of our most generous love?

Here is indeed a great mystery of God's wisdom, power and kindness. Only one mystery is greater than that of the Incarnation, that of the most Holy Trinity. No human mind can explain how there is one divine nature, possessed by Three Persons; how Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three really distinct Persons, possess the one same infinite essence, one mind, and one will. Likewise is it a mystery how one and the same Person can be God and man, a man too with all the natural limitations of human nature. Theologians say that He extends His hypostatic function, or that which constitutes Him a person and by which He possesses the divine nature, to His human nature and thus makes it His personal possession. But how is this done? It is a mystery now, but to see it will be a source of eternal joy for us in Heaven.

2) CHRIST OUR MODEL. The second truth which we must bear in mind when meditating on the life of

Christ is that God gave Him to us as a model. One object for which He became man and exactly like us in everything, sin only excepted, consists in giving us an example which we must at least to some degree imitate if we wish to save our souls.

To be our model He had within the short span of thirty-three years and a few months to live in every condition to which human nature may be subject. He had to be a babe, a child, a youth and an adult; He had to be a worker and a professional man, a subject and a superior; He had to act as layman and as a priest and religious; to live in a family and away from His kindred. He suffered poverty and obscurity, contradiction and persecution, humiliations and contempt, ridicule and misunderstanding, meagre success and egregious failure. He was also accorded a small measure of honor, esteem, loyalty, glory, fame. In short, there is no situation in which man may find himself, but Christ shows us how that situation is to be met or to be borne, what we ought to do and what to avoid.

Nor is it left to our choice either to imitate His example or strike out in an altogether different direction. Some degree of imitation is absolutely necessary for all who have attained the use of reason and want to reach Heaven. St. Paul's words are as clear about this truth as is the doctrine of Christ Himself. Christ says that any one who does not follow Him, is not worthy of Him (Matt. 10,38), that He who follows Him shall have the light and that any one who does not follow Him, can not go to Heaven (John 8,12–21.) And St.

Paul teaches among other truths concerning this point that "whom He (God) foreknew (foresaw as those who will go to Heaven), He also predestined to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8,29).

3) The Christian Virtues. Closely connected with this truth is a third, namely that not every kind of virtue, but only Christian virtue, will lead to Heaven. This truth St. Augustine and the Church have made very clear in their struggle against Pelagianism.

According to the doctrine of the Church there are natural virtues such as justice, prudence, self-control, a certain degree of chastity, which man can discover by the use of his reason and which he can practice for natural motives. These natural virtues Christ has supernaturalized by giving them a new motive and accompanying them with supernatural grace. At the same time He has enlarged their sphere and brought them to perfection. Thus He has changed the love of one's kindred and nation into universal charity, the love of God as Our Supreme Lord and Creator into the love of Him as Our Father.

Besides these He teaches both by word and example virtues until then unknown in the world and in their essence entirely Christian. These are the virtues of which the Apostle says that they are "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the gentiles, foolishness" (1. Cor. 1,23). Such are virginal chastity, religious poverty, evangelical obedience, heroic love of enemies, self-denial, love of the cross, love of humiliations. It is

a sad fact that in our age quite a number of these virtues are decried as being against the spirit of the times and as being false asceticism. But they form the climax of Christ's moral teachings and for this reason must fit our age too, unless we wish to surrender the best that is in Christianity. What the Savior says about virginal chastity is true of other virtues: "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given" (Mat. 19,11). One great benefit of meditating attentively and lovingly on the Life of Christ is precisely that it secures for us the grace of "taking the word."

## V. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

If we may make some practical suggestions concerning the use of this work for daily meditations, it would be this: It will hardly be possible to finish each of these meditations in one period of mental prayer; nor is this intended. It was not found feasible to divide the matter so that each section could be gone through in one hour of meditation and at the same time bring out the ideas of the evangelist and do justice to every sentence of the sacred text. The reader will easily know how much matter he needs for thirty or sixty minutes. If what is left of the section or meditation as we call it, does not suffice for another period of mental prayer, he can secure more matter by taking it from the following. There is no inconvenience nor logical defect in this, for as we pursue the order of the sacred text, the logical sequence and connection is never interrupted.

The applications are merely suggestions. Any other

application that the pious reader finds by his own effort will certainly be better than those suggested here.

We have refrained as a rule from suggesting acts of the will that correspond to the subject matter. It seemed better to give a list of acts of the will in the general sketch of the Ignatian method of meditating and leave to the reader the most perfect freedom in the choice of these acts. To do otherwise would be to put obstacles to the divine inspirations and discourage the initiative which St. Ignatius prized so highly that in the directions he gives to the retreat-master, he inserts a special warning against going too much into details in proposing to the exercitant the matter of the meditation.

An additional reason for not dictating to the free will of the person who devotes himself to mental prayer, lies in the fact that these acts of the will ought not to be made only when we come to the practical application, but also whilst we reflect on the mystery itself or try to understand the meaning of the instruction or doctrine which Jesus is giving us. The more frequently we "exercise" the will, to use the word of the Saint, the more does the meditation assume the nature of a prayer and the better does it serve to instill or perfect the virtues in our soul. And here we must not overlook the fact that every one who practices mental prayer for any length of time, will sooner or later reach the state in which the work of the memory and understanding will be so short and quick that he will immediately see the truth and be impressed by it. It then will be useless

torment to try to find more light about it and the only reasonable and profitable activity will consist in the work of the will. He who desires to get more information about this point may profitably read the first chapters in Fr. Poulain's work "The Graces of Interior Prayer."

## SYNOPSIS OF SAINT MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

According to an ancient tradition quoted by Eusebius in his History of the Church, St. Matthew wrote his gospel when about to leave Palestine to preach to the Gentiles. Christ had commanded the apostles to shake the dust off their feet, if their doctrine was not accepted in the cities and villages of the Holy Land, and to expend their energy upon the pagan world. Years of fruitless toil convinced the evangelist that the time to carry out this charge had come. In spite of supreme efforts and striking miracles, Jesus remained "a scandal for the house of Israel." The cause of their rejection lay in the Jews themselves.

However, before leaving the inhospitable country, Matthew wished to remind the people of their guilt and to leave them a clear proof of the Messianic character of Christ. His gospel furnishes this evidence. To gauge the significance of this work we must put ourselves in the Apostle's place, keeping his purpose in mind.

The work may be divided into three parts:

I. Introduction—Preparation for Christ's work (1,1 – 4,16).

1) In establishing the genealogy of the ancestors of Christ the evangelist briefly reviews the history of Israel from the call of Abraham to the appearance of the Savior, inasmuch as it is a preparation for the salvation which the Messias is to bring (1,1–25).

2) He next gives a description of the reception accorded Christ upon His coming into this world (2,1–23).

3) He recounts how Israel is prepared directly by the Baptist for the public appearance of the Savior. The work of that great preacher reaches its climax when he is permitted in person to introduce Jesus, and his testimony is confirmed by Heaven at the baptism of Christ (3,1 – 4,16).

II. Thesis: Jesus of Nazareth, whom Israel rejected, is the promised Messias Who brings salvation to the world.

Part I—The Message Addressed to Israel (4,17 – 16,12).

The evangelist describes:

1) How Jesus preaches in Galilee and confirms His words by miracles (4,17 – 9,35);

2) What prospects the "Kingdom of Heaven" has in Israel, and how Christ Himself is received (9,36 – 12,45);

3) How Jesus segregates His disciples from the people, and finally rejects the nation (12,46 – 16,12);

4) The entire description attains a climax in the solemn profession of Christ's divinity made by Peter near Cæsarea Philippi in his own name and that of his fellow-apostles. This marks the final separation. The Jewish nation refuses to believe in Christ. He leaves it to its fate and devotes Himself to another task, the foundation and organization of His Church. Christ is rejected by the synagogue; consequently, He declares His intention of establishing a new Church, founded upon Peter as a firm rock. The evangelist now leads over to the second part (16,13–20).

## Part II—The Organization of the Church— (16,21 – 25,46).

Saint Matthew narrates:

1) How Christ instructs His apostles and organizes in detail His Church, to supersede the synagogue (16,21 – 20,28).

2) The last struggle of the hostile synagogue precipitated by the cure of the blind man of Jericho; the different phases of this struggle; the eventual victory of Christ, who leaves the Jews with the threat of the end of the world and the last judgment (20,29 – 25,46).

III. Conclusion: The tragic close of Christ's sojourn among the Israelites, which, however, results in a glorious victory, (26,1 – 28,20).

1) The chosen people become guilty of deicide. By

His death on the cross Christ succumbs apparently to the Synagogue (26,1 – 27,50);

2) Christ triumphs in His glorious resurrection; finally and irrevocably, He turns from Israel and chooses the Gentiles (27,51 – 28,20).

Further subdivisions will appear in the text.

It is not intended that all the subject matter offered in one meditation be gone through in one period of mental prayer. As the words of the Evangelist are followed in the order of his gospel, the reader may break off at any point, continue the next time where he stopped before, and if not enough matter is left in a meditation, he may add more from the next. (See Practical Suggestions, page 39*)

# THE INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS OF THE GOSPEL

## Part I

### PREPARATION FOR CHRIST

### Meditation 1

#### CHRIST THE CONSUMMATION OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt. 1,1.)

This verse serves first of all as superscription of the appended list of Christ's ancestors. At the same time it proposes "Jesus Christ" as subject of the entire gospel. Since Saint Matthew applies this double name to the Savior here and nowhere else in his entire work, to obtain the full connotation of the verse we may translate them: "Jesus, who is the Christ"; "Jesus, the Messias"; this latter is the Hebrew vocable for the Greek term by which the coming Redeemer is designated. And indeed, Jesus as Savior of the world, forms the entire theme of the first gospel.

By referring to David and Abraham as progenitors of our Lord the evangelist marks Him as the culmina-

tion of the history of Israel; when he adds the title "Christ or Messias" to the name by which men know Him, he designates Him Lord of all future ages.

The history of salvation proper begins with Abraham, founder of the chosen people; it attains new heights in David, first king of the house of Juda and one of the greatest types of the Redeemer and His supernatural Kingship; it ends in and through Jesus Christ. Thus even in the choice of only two ancestors of the Savior as indicated in the superscription of the gospel the inspired author again emphasizes the thesis which he will prove conclusively in the subsequent work.

Let us ask for the grace that Christ may be a Savior to us and through us to many others.

1. THE SON OF ABRAHAM. "The book of the generation of . . . the son of Abraham." The great work of man's redemption begins with Abraham. He is selected from nations steeped in sin and idolatry. He leaves home and kindred to become the father of a people who will preserve faith in the one true God and hope in the coming redemption. "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee. And I will make thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and magnify thy name, and thou shalt be blessed" (Gen. 12,1.2) because in the fullness of time the Savior is to come from thy family.

By a miracle God gives him Isaac, son and heir

of the promises; time and again, during nearly nineteen hundred years still to elapse before the birth of the Savior, Divine Providence intervenes that the blessed promise be fulfilled.

*Applications.* 1) God's ways are the same today. When He chooses priests and religious as intermediaries in the work of salvation, He charges them: "Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house." Like Abraham they are to become parents of a people dedicated to God in a much higher sense than Israel. When through priestly ministrations a child of God is born in baptism or a soul is raised from spiritual death in the sacrament of penance, a greater miracle is effected than when God gave the joys of parenthood to an aged couple whom He had called from home and country. Likewise, when through prayers, labors and sacrifices of religious, love of God, virtuous habits, noble ideals and aspirations are implanted in the souls of the young; when a sinner oppressed with the burden of disease and sin is reclaimed to a virtuous life or saved from eternal death, the miracle of grace is more marvelous than the fact that an aged woman becomes a mother. Through the priest and the religious a merciful God also preserves a race pure and virtuous in the midst of a defiled, sin-laden world. But God insists on one condition: "Go forth out of thy country," belong to God and to God alone, not even to kindred and family. While you recognize their just claims, you belong solely and unreservedly to your vocation, your work, to the souls entrusted to you. This sacrifice is the only purchase-price of God's blessing for priests, religious and the souls confided to them. Priest of God, spouse

of Christ, dissever yourself from the world, even from family ties, should duty demand it. Be a whole-souled priest, a whole-souled religious! Learn to be detached. You cannot be true to your vocation if you are of the world; your work will suffer greatly if you are too much attached to your relatives and consider the bonds of blood stronger than the interests of souls. Eventually, the two will clash and unless you have acquired detachment and practiced it faithfully, nature will bar the way of duty and grace. The temporal concerns of your relatives will engross your attention to the exclusion of your obligations as priest and religious. Acquire and practice detachment if you expect God to make you, like Abraham, the parent of a great and chosen generation. Be first of all a priest, a religious, in the true sense of the word.

2) Nineteen hundred years of preparation were required for the coming of the Savior. What a long period of time! Nineteen centuries fraught with wondrous works, with severe penalties for the infidelities of those who were to prepare the world for the Redeemer. The work of redemption like that of sanctification, always proceeds slowly. We must bear this in mind in all efforts for our own spiritual progress as well as in our work for the salvation of souls and their advancement in sanctity. The powers which retarded the preparation of the world for Christ are more or less active in every soul; they yield but gradually to the urge of grace and the labors of those engaged in the difficult task. There is neither a method of achieving sainthood in a few days nor a secret process to make others holy over night. Patience and sustained efforts alone avail. As the Incarnation of the Son of God

repaid the long and anxious wait, the manifold interventions of the Almighty and the toil of the prophets of the Old Dispensation; so the birth, the formation and growth of Christ in souls, as Saint Paul describes the work of an apostle, are an adequate motive never to grow weary, but to persevere.

II. THE SON OF DAVID. "The book of the generation of . . . the Son of David."

It was through David that the posterity of Abraham became the ruling nation in the country which God had promised them. He directed the destiny of His chosen people. He rejected Saul, the man who "from the shoulders upward surpassed all the warriors of Israel," and chose the youngest of Jesse's sons, a mere boy, and had him anointed king. When Israel's army lost heart and its picked warriors trembled, this boy with staff and sling laid Goliath low and saved the nation from defeat and servitude. Uncounted were the hardships, bitter the preparation for his vocation. Through persecution and privations he struggled to a splendid throne and proved himself "the man after God's heart" (1 Kings 13,14). Thus did he merit to become an ancestor of the Savior, a type of Him in suffering and in glory.

*Applications.* 1) "Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God" (Hebr. 5,4). These words of the Apostle apply to the vocation of a priest or a religious as well as to the dignity of the High Priest, to which they directly refer. One who is not called

has no more right to intrude into the sanctuary than to usurp the throne of David. But in calling to the sacerdotal dignity and the religious state God likes to manifest His greatness by choosing the little and humble in the eyes of men; "the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong." (1 Cor. 1,27), "that he that glorieth, may glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1,31).

2) All the powers we have as priests are God's gifts and should not be denied in false humility; all must be used for His service in the position and the work destined for us. All privileges are likewise His gifts and should be employed entirely in His service. With the apostles we must be convinced that "neither he that planteth is anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase"; the souls that are saved are "God's husbandry, God's building" (1 Cor. 3,7.9). David too was forcibly reminded by God that his preferment, his success in freeing his country and his people from their enemies, were his own work. "I took thee from the pastures, from following the sheep. . . . I have slain all thine enemies. . . . I have made thee a great man" (2 Kings 7,8.9). Let us carefully guard against pride in success and not attribute it wholly or chiefly to our efforts. Others have worked hard, perhaps harder, bringing into play superior natural gifts and virtues, but accomplished little. Our mistakes would have been more egregious had not God performed the principal part of our labors. Let us bear this constantly in mind to shield ourselves from pride and future disappointments. We should avoid commenting upon the favorable results of our efforts and not flatter ourselves even in

thought. When the task is brought to a successful issue, let us thank God and forget it.

3) David was chosen from a humble station and reminded of it by God Himself. Even if God selected us from a family of social prestige, after a childhood and youth of virtue, we can lay no claim to the dignity which is ours. Vocation to spiritual life is always a free gift of God. We recall companions of our youth, we find a considerable number of people in the world today who, humanly speaking, might have been chosen as well as we, but were not. In the epistle to the Romans Saint Paul explains this very minutely in reference to all supernatural favors. As illustrations he quotes Ismael, Isaac, Esau, Jacob and Moses, to whom the Lord said: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." The apostle infers: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9,7–16).

Neither the priest nor the religious may ever forget that vocation is a God-given grace of which at some time in his life he may have been unworthy. And yet, we have been chosen in preference to thousands and thousands. The constant remembrance of this will keep the right spirit intact within us; it will save us from those dangerous rocks that have wrecked many a vocation, a worldly mind and the spirit of pride. It will prevent us from seeking personal comfort or gain, striving for self-aggrandizement, endeavoring to gain for ourselves that affection of souls that should be directed Godward.

III. THE MESSIAS. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ." We call attention again to the double

name applied to the Savior by Saint Matthew and to the significant mention of those two progenitors only who typify more than others the Messianic character of Christ.

According to the prophecy often repeated in the Old Law, He who is the glory of Israel was to come forth from the seed of Abraham, in the house of David; He, of whom King David was a faint type when he freed Israel from its foes, made it a powerful nation, feared, esteemed and blessed, as in the days of the youngest son of Jesse and his immediate successor, Solomon; He, in whom the blessing of Abraham was to be fulfilled for all nations and races of the earth. From Him Abraham and David, from Him the people of the Old Dispensation received an important rank for themselves, for us and for the entire world. For He is "the Christ," called by God's direction "Jesus," i. e. God-Savior.

What would the world be without Jesus, the Christ? The history of the times before His benign advent tells us plainly. If one, trusting in the natural progress of civilization, does not believe that testimony, he has but to look at the world today trying to do without Him. To save not only the people of ages past but the people of today and the people of ages to come, the Son of God became the "Son of David." To cooperate in this great work, David and the people of Israel, dowered with blessings of Heaven, were descendants of Abraham. They had to serve in preparing for sinful man the redemption which Christ was to accom-

plish. They were instruments in the hands of an infinitely merciful God, who despite Adam's sin and the frequent heinous crimes of his descendants, aye despite our own sins, thought only of love and salvation and decreed that as mankind had fallen through the misdeeds of men, salvation was also to come through the instrumentality of men. Not only Abraham and his descendants, but Jesus Himself assumes our human nature; He is subject to that overwhelming "command of the Father," which encompassed a life of toil and hardship of every description, His passion and His death, because God wishes to save men through men.

*Applications.* 1) In view of this work of divine wisdom and love, let us frequently thank God not only in our name, but in the name of all mankind for His beneficence in giving us as Redeemer His only Son. Let us pray likewise that men may again realize that all salvation for the individual and for society can come only from Christ. It is one of the greatest calamities for so-called Christian nations to aim to succeed without Him, to seek remedies for the ills under which the world today groans, everywhere except where alone they can be found, in Christ and in the Church, with which He will abide until the consummation of the world.

Men study sociology, engage in social service work, but do they not forget at times that much of what text books teach and undenominational organizations and agencies do, misses the goal, because no regard is paid to Him who

alone is the divinely-appointed Redeemer from the consequences of original and personal sins?

2) Jesus is, however, not only the Savior of human society, but my Savior. Of this truth I must always be convinced, not only in theory but in practice. Are not all my difficulties the result of sin, of my own sins and of those of others? If I believe this, I must act accordingly and have recourse to Him whose God-given mission it is to free from sin and its consequences. From Him must come that relief which Divine Wisdom deems best for me, whether it be release from trouble or strength to endure it in the proper way. Why then, do I not go to Jesus concealed in the tabernacle for help in need? I must beware of resembling the Israelites who rejected the Savior; on the contrary, I must always bear in mind the great lesson which God wishes to convey in the first lines of the gospel of Saint Matthew.

3) The priest and the religious are called by God to share in the mission of the Redeemer. The way was prepared by Abraham and David; the priest and religious are to apply its fruits efficaciously to men. The priest is a priest primarily for the benefit of others. For them he receives all his powers. Religious, though not of sacerdotal dignity, must according to the mind of the Church, labor for the salvation of souls. The contemplative does so by prayers and austerities; the active religious supplements these by spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Religious must utilize the talents entrusted to them to deserve the commendation: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a

few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25,21).

Let us not be selfish nor seek personal gratification, comfort, honor, but generously spend ourselves in the service of our neighbor to win him for Christ. Let us be more than grateful if this end is achieved. This presupposes a large measure of self-denial.

4) God's ways are wonderful and His mercies exceedingly great. "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him? (Ps. 8,5). We are called to be God's collaborators in the great work of saving sinners. In all human history, man's salvation is God's aim. To this cause we are to devote all our energies; for this God has chosen us like Abraham, exalted us like David, ranked us with Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. This sublime task, so salutary for the world, deserves all effort that mortal man can bring to bear upon it; it is worthy of his most enthusiastic response. If its accomplishment entails so great an effort on the part of the Savior, even the supreme sacrifice of His life, is there any effort or sacrifice too great for us? Let us share the sentiments of Saint Paul who tells the Corinthians: "I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls" (2 Cor. 12,15).

COLLOQUY: Gratitude for vocation; oblation of self for the work of the Savior; prayer for apostolic spirit and for courage and sacrifice. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and strengthen me with a perfect spirit. I will teach the unjust thy ways, and the wicked shall be converted to thee" (Ps. 50,14.15).

## Meditation 2

### ISRAEL'S PREPARATION FOR CHRIST

(Matt. 1,2–16.)

"Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judas, and his brethren. And Judas begot Thares and Zara of Thamar. And Phares begot Esron, and Esron begot Aram, and Aram begot Aminadab, and Aminadab begot Naasson, and Naasson begot Salmon, and Salmon begot Booz of Rahab. And Booz begot Obed of Ruth, and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. And David the king begot Solomon, of her that had been the wife of Urias. And Solomon begot Roboam, and Roboam begot Abia, and Abia begot Asa, and Asa begot Josaphat, and Josaphat begot Achaz and Achaz begot Ezechias, and Ezechias begot Manasses, Manasses begot Amon, and Amon begot Josias, and Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren in the transmigration of Babylon. And after the transmigration of Babylon, Jechonias begot Salathiel, and Salathiel begot Zorobabel, and Zorobabel begot Abiud, and Abiud begot Eliacim, and Eliacim begot Azor, and Azor begot Sadoc, and Sadoc begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud, and Eliud begot Eleazar, and Eleazar begot Nathan, and Nathan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

God had prepared great things for His people with the promise of still greater. Yet Israel opposed the wonderful plan of salvation, and despite manifold benefits, repeatedly turned away from Him. In consequence, the Lord though long-suffering, cast them off. Ultimately through Israel, yet in spite of Israel, He accomplished the redemption of the world.

In the genealogy of the Savior the history of Israel passes before the mind's eye, a history wherein perverse resistance to God gradually develops into open rebellion, involving the rejection of the nation notwithstanding all previous graces.

The principal sins by which Israel wrought its own ruin are indicated in the epithets appended to some names in the extensive list of Abraham's descendants. They are sins of the flesh, worldly spirit, idolatry. The eventual fate of the unfortunate nation is foreshadowed in the nomenclature of those of the house of David born after the Babylonian captivity.

Sombre, indeed, is the picture these names conjure up of a nation set apart by God as His own, sinking deeper and deeper into sin and vice, faithless to its God, taken captive by pagans, its holy city and temple reduced to a heap of smouldering ruins.

The Messias finds it in a state of sin and degradation; the royal family of David in the fourteen consecutive generations after the Babylonian captivity is not only unable to regain the throne of its ancestors, but is abased to the workshop of a poor carpenter.

Sadder still is the fact that all this misery is but

the forerunner of a far greater calamity, from which may God in His mercy preserve us, the forfeiture of the salvation of Christ due to sins of the chosen people.

Let us ask for the grace of sincere love for the Most Merciful God.

1. SINS OF THE FLESH. "Jacob begot Judas and his brethren. Judas begot Phares and Zara of Thamar." It should have been: "Jacob begot Ruben and his brethren," and: "Judas begot Onan; Onan begot Phares and Zara of Thamar." But even before Jacob, the third patriarch, dies, sin disturbs the line of descent and Ruben is deprived by his dying father of the honor of being an ancestor of Christ, because he committed a heinous sin of the flesh; Simeon and Levi, next in line, lose it, because they perpetrated a foul murder.

"Judas begot Thares and Zara of Thamar." His son Onan, after the early death of his elder brother according to the law of the "levirate" was obliged to marry the latter's wife, not yet a mother. This elder brother, "Her" by name, had been "slain by the Lord because he was wicked." But instead of obeying the law, Onan committed the sin which will bear his name to the end of time, and "therefore the Lord slew him." In her desire for offspring Thamar disguised as a harlot deceived and tempted her own father-in-law, and thus made him the parent of Phares and Zara.

As legitimate descent in paradise was to be the channel of sanctifying grace, so in the family of the patriarchs it was the means of propagating the blessing

of Abraham. For this purpose by a miracle the Lord gave Abraham an heir through Sarai. But Israel had not yet grown into a nation in Egypt, when the patriarchs, forgetting the sanctity of their inheritance, risked their vocation as bearers of divine promises by shameful sins, and forced the Almighty by a special act to restore by a spurious child the legitimate line that had been broken.

*Applications.* 1) It was above all the sin of the flesh which jeopardized Israel's call in the very beginning. This sin is man's greatest enemy; yet in his weakness, he easily succumbs to the powerful lure of fallen nature. Concupiscence played a most pernicious part in all subsequent crimes of Israel. Allied with idolatry it caused the downfall of the house of David, of the kingdoms of Israel and Juda and the captivity.

Sensuality in all its forms, in literature, art, dress, amusement is the ruination of the world today. Even when it does not lead to grievous sins, it is one of the gravest dangers to higher vocations and a deplorable hindrance to effective work for souls. It prevents union with God in prayer, impairs the merit of good works and begets frivolity and lightmindedness.

It dries up the fountains of grace without which we can accomplish naught for our personal sanctification and the salvation of others. Moreover, those to whom we minister, especially the young, readily detect this defect, are repulsed by it and lose their confidence in us, nay possibly even their respect for the sacerdotal and religious state.

Let us not forget that sensuality does not consist only in a craving for bodily pleasures, in love of comfort, natural and trivial affections, but in curiosity, license of the senses, aimless conversations, desultory reading, perusal of publications which are not in accord with the dignity of our state and the life of sacrifice to which we are called. It manifests itself also in softness, irregularity in the hour for rising and retiring, lack of modesty, want of control of the imagination, day dreaming. A hardy life, reasonable practice of mortification, untiring labor are the best means to counteract sensuality.

2) What is true of ancient Israel, is also applicable to the chosen people of God in our times. We who are entrusted with an apostolic vocation have now more than ever to guard souls against sensuality and its offshoots in modern life. Denouncing salacious literature and dangerous amusements will not suffice. We must inculcate in our charges a sincere love of virtue, realization of dangers as soon as they arise, willingness to make sacrifices for maintaining purity of soul. We must teach them not to be carried away in the mad rush for pleasure so widespread in our day, but to practice mortification and self-denial. All these precepts and warnings are more necessary, because parents too frequently neglect their obvious duty.

II. WORLDLY SPIRIT. "Salmon begot Booz of Rahab, Booz begot Obed of Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, Jesse begot David, the king. David the king begot Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias." Besides the

sin hinted at in the mother of Solomon we find in this short list the second grave fault which caused Israel to forfeit its vocation, the worldly spirit. Among various proofs we have two outstanding facts: even the patriarchs married women who did not belong to their own nation; the people dissatisfied with the sovereignty of God clamored for human kings.

When the Lord led His chosen people out of Egypt into the promised land of Chanaan, He strictly forbade them to spare the lives of the wicked Chanaanites, to make pacts or treaties with them, above all, to marry Chanaanitish women. As supreme arbiter of life and death, He had the right to make the Israelites executors of His chastisements of that immoral race; He had ample reason to forbid pacts, treaties and intermarriage, lest the chosen people be lured away from the one true God, into idolatry (Ex. 34,12 ff.; Deut. 7,1 ff).

Nevertheless directly upon entering the land of promise, we find even patriarchs marrying foreign women; "Salmon begot Booz of Rahab." Rahab was the harlot of Jericho who harbored and saved the spies of Josue. "Booz begot Obed of Ruth." Although Ruth was a noble character, she was a Moabitess and, therefore, under the general ban of God. Even while crossing the desert, "the people committed fornication with the daughters of Moab, who enticed them to attend their sacrifices, and to worship their gods. And Israel was initiated into the rites of Beelphegor (i. e. adored the

obscene idol of the Moabites) and twenty thousand of Israel were slain by the command of the Lord" (Numbers 25,1 ff).

"And Jesse begot David the king." Though David was chosen by God Himself, the demand for kings was dictated by the spirit of the world and implied a rejection of the theocracy. When Samuel was challenged practically to relinquish his position as judge and God's representative and give the people kings, he demurred. "And the Lord said to Samuel: Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they have to say to thee. For they have not rejected thee, but me, that I should not reign over them. According to all their works that they have done from the day that I brought them out of Egypt, until this day: as they have forsaken me and served strange gods, so do they also to thee" (1 Kings 8,7.8). They beheld other nations having kings and desired to be "perfect men of the world," in accord with the latest fashion. Hence they demanded of Samuel: "Make us a king to judge us, as all nations have" (1 Kings 8,5).

It was difficult for Israel to maintain its outstanding position among nations. Time and again, they dealt and associated with peoples from whom they were to keep aloof. Even the punishments of the Lord, who repeatedly delivered them into the hands of their enemies, could not bring them to their senses for any length of time. As soon as the pagan oppression abated, their weakness reasserted itself.

*Applications.* 1) By their vocation and position priests

and religious are segregated from the world. Obviously they are not to be at variance with the laity and those not of the faith, nor to live in solitary, self-centred seclusion. The shepherd must know his sheep and the apostle must be accessible to all that have a soul to save. However, although he mingles with the laity, he may not be of the laity; still less, may he be of the world while dealing with the world. Many a diversion, conversation or action permissible to the laity is not proper for him. A priest and a religious must always observe the decorum and reserve of their state and above all be vigilant lest their conduct belie their teachings and their conversation and manners savor of the world.

Holy Church, guided by the spirit of God, has decreed that their very apparel differ from that of the laity, that they be "marked" men and women. They do not detract from the dignity of their state when in quest of souls they make themselves the lowliest servants of all. But they degrade themselves and compromise much of their exalted character if for personal convenience, gain or pleasure they trespass beyond the limits and break through the restrictions by which their state is safeguarded. They become worldly and make their charges worldly.

The importance attached to this point by the Church we can see from her regulations concerning the conduct of priests when traveling.

Segregated must they be also in regard to books, papers, magazines and other publications, pictures and statues unfit for a Christian home. Would they not be veritable hypocrites if in compliance with their duty they warn others against such things, but have them in their own houses?

2) We live as a minority among people of whom more than half profess a Christianity unworthy of the name or have no church affiliation whatever; among men who in theory and practice are nearly as pagan as the people Israel had to avoid. In consequence there is great danger that the laity, especially the younger members, adopt the views and habits of those with whom they are thrown into daily contact. Is there any form of amusement, any kind of diversion in which our young folk do not feel justified to participate? Is there any pleasure resort which they do not patronize? How comparatively few of our young men and women do not consider a so-called "friendship" with a non-Catholic of the opposite sex perfectly correct? Their danger is parallel to that of the Israelites in associating with pagans. What then is our duty in this regard? Will it suffice to confine ourselves to merely negative warnings after the trouble has begun? Would it not be better to warn beforehand, be positive in our procedure by showing the prudence of right conduct, the good effects of being "unworldly" in the proper sense of the word, the importance of eternal salvation?

III. DEFECTION FROM GOD. "Solomon begot Roboam . . . and Achaz begot Ezechias . . . and Amon begot Josias, and Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren in the transmigration of Babylon. And after the transmigration of Babylon, Jechonias begot Salathiel . . . And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ."

Israel had rejected the theocracy; but the Lord in His patience and mercy renewed His promises in

David. He pledged His word that the royal throne should remain in David's family on condition that his descendants observe His laws and ordinances. He went still farther by promising His mercies to them unconditionally (2 Kings 7,12 ff; Ps. 131; Ps. 88).

With David a new series of ancestors of the Messias begins; but the very first name is ominous. "David begot Solomon of her, who had been the wife of Urias." "Solomon loved and married women of Egypt, Moab, Edom, Sidon and of the Hethites. . . . His heart was turned away by women to follow strange gods. . . . Solomon worshipped Astharthe, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Moloch, the idol of the Ammonites" (3 Kings 11,1–5).

Under his son Roboam ten of the twelve tribes fell away from the house of David owing to the exactions of Solomon and his son, and formed the kingdom of Israel. Soon after this division of the kingdom of David the worst corruption, including the most abominable idolatry, invaded first the kingdom of Israel, and subsequently that of Juda. The very names of the kings that succeed, connote moral degradation. Of Ezechias alone it is said: "He did that which was good before the Lord, according to all that David, his father had done" (4 Kings 18,3); and of Josias: "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father" (4 Kings 22,2).

We may say that only seven of the twenty kings of Juda were good. Therefore, the royal glory of Da-

vid's house terminates after fourteen generations. Others rule in Juda after the Babylonian captivity, while the descendants of David are submerged in poverty and oblivion, until the greatest descendant, Jesus of Nazareth, appears as the son of a poor carpenter.

*Applications.* 1) We are not likely to commit the sin of idolatry. But is not every mortal sin a species of idolatry? And is it not true that a deliberate venial sin which has become habitual, estranges us from God? The nation of the Israelites was of world-importance not on account of the greatness of its rulers nor by reason of its extraordinary culture, but solely because of its religious vocation. In a similar way, the Catholic priesthood and religious orders possess true greatness and significance because they are consecrated to God and are mediators between God and the world. They are to be the bearers of God's graces to the people and to bring Him near to men. But they must also lead men to God.

However, in order not to be dragged down by the sinful world, but to come nearer to God as well as lead men to Him, they themselves must be firmly united with Him; they must be deeply grounded in Him and cling to Him with every fibre of their being. With St. Paul they must say: "I live, now not I, Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2,20).

Thus only will they be true mediators between God and men. They must not give way to the sinful tendencies of human nature nor permit themselves to be drawn away from God into the vain ambitions and affairs of men; but they must firmly adhere to their Lord by faithful

observance of His laws, and thus defend and protect His rights and honor among mankind.

2) But this dark picture of Israel's infidelity to its high calling is also the background against which the wonderful image of divine mercy and long suffering stands out in all its brightness. Verily a heart filled with such condescending love, such readiness to pardon, save and help, is found only in the God of infinite mercy.

Someone has said with truth and insight: "Rather would I be judged by God than even by my mother." A mother that would forgive and condone the crimes and base ingratitude of so many centuries, can scarcely be found. The mercy of God can never find fitting praise. This thought should not be an incentive to continue offending Him, but it should inspire us with confidence if we sorrow for our shortcomings; above all, it must increase our love of so beneficent, so gracious, so merciful a God.

COLLOQUY. Acts of love of God, thanksgiving for His mercy to us, petition for perseverance and fidelity in our vocation. "Deliver me from blood, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall extol thy justice. O Lord, thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare thy praise" (Ps. 50,16.17).

## Meditation 3

### GOD'S PROVIDENCE (Matt. 1,17)

"So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David, to the transmigration of Babylon, are fourteen generations; and from the transmigration of Babylon to Christ are fourteen generations."

Even if he sins, man's lot in life with all attendant circumstances is in the hand of God. The internal development of Israel, more and more forgetful of God, as we notice in every period of its history, is counteracted by the divine plan. Unchangeable in infinite mercy, with supreme power as well as heavenly patience and wisdom, God prepares the advent of the Redeemer. This operation of the "Good Lord" is obvious when we consider the genealogy of Christ.

From the heights of Heaven He looks down upon the vain pursuits of men. Nothing escapes Him and nothing is withheld from His guiding hand.

Let us ask Him to direct us, lest our shortsightedness cause our ruin.

1. GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM. The divine hand surely and firmly weaves the threads of history, though they often seem a veritable tangle. But whenever they are tangled by men, Providence unravels them anew and directs everything to its final end. This becomes most evident when by a miracle the Lord alters the order of nature, as for example in the birth of Isaac. Though unobserved, the divine operation continues and even the sins of men are made subservient to God's purposes, as illustrated in the history of Thamar. Things very frequently work out contrary to the expectations of men. Isaac had destined the rights of primogeniture for Esau, but God had chosen Jacob. Again, in spite of oppression, He made His people grow numerous and powerful in Egypt and through Moses and Josue He led them into the land of promise. The confusion rampant in the days of the Judges, the impiety of so many kings, who frequently pursued their vicious plans with relentless energy, to the great harm of the people, ultimately served the designs of God. The Babylonian captivity was to purge the nation of its idolatrous propensities, and the yoke of foreigners, which after the exile almost unremittingly weighed upon it, kept alive and active the hope and desire of the coming Redeemer.

In like manner, the happy and auspicious events and the men prominent as saviors and leaders of the nation were chosen with this great end in view. Moses, founder of the covenant, Josue, illustrious conqueror of Chanaan, David, liberator of the nation, Solomon,

its most glorious sovereign, were types of the coming Redeemer. Thus the entire history of the Jewish people with all its vicissitudes, with God's miracles and mercies, with Israel's infidelity and its consequent punishments, constitutes irrefutable proof of the power and wisdom of Divine Providence, which "reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly" (Wis. 8,1).

*Applications.* 1) The same Providence today directs all events in the history of mankind and of every individual. But over and above this, the Church, priests and religious have repeatedly been vouchsafed the express promise of this solicitous guidance. Therefore, we may entrust ourselves with unbounded confidence to God's care. If we resist Him, we shall harm ourselves, but we can never frustrate His plans. Therefore, let us regard all the happenings of our lives as emanating from an all-bountiful, all-wise, all-powerful God. Let us willingly accept whatever He sends us; let us consign ourselves and our dearest interests to Him, and look upon everything as coming from a most loving Father, who cares for us with more than maternal tenderness and with unerring wisdom. Saint Ignatius Loyola aptly says that faint-heartedness in God's service, fear of sacrifice, lack of generosity and of holy indifference to creatures, are due to ignorance of the doctrine of Divine Providence. But this confidence is a grace that must be obtained by persevering prayer. Let us, therefore, frequently entreat it and then act according to the maxim of Saint Teresa of Avila: "Rather will I forfeit my life than confidence with God!"

2) God knows best what is needful for our welfare; He knows ways and means to protect and promote His cause and the interests of souls. We are shortsighted; if we, as it were, take the care of our affairs out of His hands and by diplomacy, political machinations and other means try to further personal interests, secure positions and appointments, interfere with the free decisions and choice of our superiors, we place ourselves beyond the pale of Providence and shall have to bear the consequences. Too frequently shall we be sorely disappointed and instead of enjoying contentment and peace of soul, we shall become the prey of disgust, discouragement, and lose the right to expect help or consolation from God. God's general plan will prevail in the end, but not to our advantage. One of the unhappiest of creatures is he who must admit that he is not where God wants him to be.

II. GOD'S LONG-SUFFERING AND MERCY. If we read the genealogy of Christ mindful of the obstinate resistance and oft-repeated infidelity of Israel, this list of ancestors becomes the history of the Lord's mercy and forbearance. All their sins and all the abominations they and their people practiced could not shake His determination to save the nation. He was faithful to His promises, however much Israel did to render them null and void. His mercy embraced saint and sinner, just as the genealogy of the Savior includes holy and unholy men.

Moreover, when Israel was most perverse in resistance to God, He showed greatest condescension. He accommodated Himself to their carnal and sinful as-

pirations in order to hasten the accomplishment of redemption. Thus when the people ignominiously repudiated the theocracy and demanded human monarchs in place of the Divine Ruler, He not only granted their ungrateful desire, but made the kingdom of David's family the foundation of the more immediate preparation for Christ and His kingdom. When the ten tribes fell away from the kingdom He had established, when the worship made obligatory for all Israel, degenerated into shameful idolatry, and a rival temple was erected in violation of His strict prohibition, He sent them some of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, Elias and Eliseus. Until the very end of this rebel state, prophecy did not die out among them; Osee, Amos, Jonas, and Abdias lived in their midst; and in the kingdom of Juda He sent the greatest prophets and delivered His most splendid and most important prophecies while the worst monarchs occupied the throne. Isaias lived when Achaz was in power.

Finally, even when He chastised the people for their sins and made them feel the rigor of His wrath in the Babylonian oppression, He sent His messengers to console them and to induce them to accept the visitation in the spirit of penance. By His order, Jeremias remained with the poorest citizens in the land of Juda and Daniel became the great prophet of the captivity.

After the return to Palestine, God repeatedly raised up in the nation great men like the Machabees and continued to speak to it through inspired writers until the books of the Machabees were given to Israel about

a century before the promised Redeemer Himself appeared.

*Applications.* 1) God, so to speak, pursues man with His mercies. No one, not even the greatest sinner has reason to despair as long as he lives. Everywhere and at all times, God extends His hand in forgiveness, and to be saved, man has but to accept it. St. Paul admonishes all, Jew as well as Gentile, infidel and believer, not to "despise the riches of God's goodness, and patience, and long suffering," nor lose sight of the fact that "the benignity of God leadeth to penance" (Rom. 2, 4).

However frequently one may have fallen, it is never too late to rise; for as long as man lives on earth, pardon and peace are offered him. Everything, even one's sins, if sorrowed for, may conduce to salvation. One thing only is required: man must allow himself to be won by God's paternal kindness and love Him with a sincere and humble heart. He must relinquish pride and self-esteem, acknowledging that he is only a poor sinner. As long as he is surprised at a serious fall, as long as he is irritated for having debased himself in his own opinion and perhaps that of others, as long as he is intent upon regaining self-esteem and "squaring himself" with God, as long as he endeavors to coerce divine Justice into a pardon by what he deems adequate satisfaction, he will despair, because he approaches God in a wrong spirit, with a false conception of his sin and of the attitude he should assume. Judas realized his guilt; he believed that the only means to secure pardon was the release of Christ; failing in this, he despaired. But if we humbly remember and acknowledge our sins, admit our utter inability to render adequate

satisfaction and consider ourselves unworthy of pardon, our salvation will be ensured.

2) Have we not frequently experienced the mercy and long-suffering of our gracious Lord? There have been times in our lives perhaps, when we resisted God's grace and followed the lead of our passions; yet God continued to be merciful to us and having begun in our souls the work of vocation, He did not withdraw His precious gift as we justly deserved, but pursued us with His graces until we finally yielded to His bountiful designs. Even after we embraced the state to which He called us in preference to thousands, perhaps there has been a time when forgetful of our obligations we lived in a condition of tepidity more or less pronounced. God did not reject us. Perhaps even at present we do not measure up to the requirements of our condition. In all humility let us rouse ourselves, acknowledge our unworthiness and with the help of divine grace begin anew.

3) Let us also learn how to imitate the mercy and long-suffering of the good God in dealing with those of our charges who do not correspond to our efforts. Prudence at times may dictate that we leave them temporarily to their own resources; but we should never give them up as hopeless. To despair of their reform, to brand them hopeless cases will not benefit us, but may do great harm to them. It is one of the most disastrous mistakes in the care of souls and in the work of education.

III. GOD'S WAYS. Although God is condescending, kind and merciful, "His thoughts are not men's

thoughts, and His ways are not men's ways." (Is. 55,8.)

Divine wisdom differs from human wisdom, nay seems contrary to it in the preparation for the coming Redeemer. The temporal renown which Israel enjoyed under the kings of the house of David, caused the most deplorable decline of the religious spirit. It fostered a worldly disposition of mind and led to idolatry, which caused the loss of earthly splendor, liberty, and prosperity. All the hopes and desires of the people had for their objective mere earthly power under a Messias who was to be no more than a great political ruler and a world monarch.

Such were the ambitions of Israel even after the Babylonian captivity. This was one reason why the house of David after the exile constantly sank into deeper oblivion, until Jesus the Messias and promised king appeared as the son of a poor carpenter and as a king whose kingdom was not of this world. He was to manifest Himself as a Redeemer from sin, not from political oppression. He was to detach the human heart from this world, its dross and trivialities, to direct it heavenward where God alone is supreme ruler. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

*Application.* The human soul oppressed by the sensual part of nature always reverts to things mundane. It constantly allows itself to be deceived by earthly glamor. What urgent need is there even today of that humble Savior, model of poverty, sent by Divine Wisdom!

Unless we follow Him, He never can become a Re-

deemer, a guide to true salvation, which is of Heaven, not of earth. Heaven, however, is far above us; it requires violence to uplift depraved human nature to its heights. The priest and the religious engaged in the service of souls, must not only pursue this path, but lead others along it. We should never have understood this truth, still less have practiced it and convinced others of its necessity, if Divine Wisdom had not labored to produce those conditions which compelled the Son of David and heir to his throne to spend His life in poverty, lowliness, and the struggle for the daily bread. Let us entreat the same Divine Wisdom to be our guide on the same road that we may lead others thereon. The world esteems riches and honors; yet riches and honors do not lead to Christ nor to Heaven, where the Son of man sits at the right hand of the Father. For the priest this practical lesson in the poverty and obscurity of Christ amounts to this: he must not strive to amass wealth, to surround himself with all kinds of comfort, to seek publicity as one who is doing great work of one kind or another. For the religious it means very faithful observance not only of the vow but of the virtue of poverty, love of obscurity, lowly work and a state of submission and obedience. Says a modern author very aptly: "Since the riches of a religious are his abilities, the lesson for him might be put thus: 'His abilities are not to be used for his own private purposes.' For the layman it is this: 'Do not attach your heart to the goods of this world; do not consider money the great aim of life. Do not broadcast your achievements.' "

COLLOQUY. Thank God for His mercy and forbearance towards you and for the life of poverty and se-

clusion which Christ had to undergo for you. Make acts of confidence in His infinite goodness and entreat the grace to place yourself with full trust and entire submission to the disposition of God.

"Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they have comforted me." (Ps. 22,4.)

## Meditation 4

### THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

(Matt. 1,16)

"And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

The concluding lines of the Messianic genealogy touch upon the second greatest mystery of Christian faith, the Incarnation of the Son of God. Let us ponder for a while upon this mystery; it is the greatest gift of our Heavenly Father, the most sublime creation of the Holy Spirit, the most telling proof the Divine Son has given us of His love.

The plain, simple room in which after the message of the angel the Holy Ghost descended upon Mary was the scene of the most important and most wonderful event in the entire history of the world and human-kind. The mystery was wrought invisibly, and yet its effects penetrated earth, Heaven and hell.

Let us ask for interior knowledge of God's love and of the incomprehensible majesty of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

I. THE GREATEST GIFT OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER. "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son" (John 3,16). God certainly bestowed munificent gifts upon the world when He gave great prophets to Israel. But the gift of the Incarnation surpasses all that the Jews received under the Old Covenant in the same degree as God is exalted above men. The Eternal Son is one in essence with the Father, consubstantial with Him, as theology says, "the beloved, the only Son." And the Father gave Him to mankind. Through the Incarnation He has become ours, our brother, like us in everything, sin only excepted; our teacher and guide, from whom we obtain light and strength; our head, from whom as members we receive life; above all our Redeemer. The benevolence of the Father shines forth with special lustre in this that "when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5,8).

This is God's answer to men's sin. In their perversity they said; "I will not serve" (Jer. 2,20), and set their own sinful will against God's supreme dominion; therefore, God sent His Son, clothed with our sinful flesh that He might die for us. "How hath he not also, with him given us all things" (Rom. 8,32.), pardon for sin, divine sonship, eternal life?

*Applications.* 1) "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things He hath given me" (Ps. 115,12)? What have we to give Him but our sinful heart? But we should give it to Him. A small return indeed, a miserable creature

for the Son of God! But then, this means that our whole being with all we are and all we possess, must be consecrated entirely to God. We must become very little and insignificant in the sight of God; but God must grow in us, so that we being annihilated before Him with all our self-will, He may become our one and all. This is merely a debt we owe Him, not a free gift. But God is willing to accept it as though it were a gift and recompense for His only begotten Son.

This oblation must consist not only of words and empty sentiments. Therefore ask yourself what it is that prevents this complete sacrifice. If this seems too vague and difficult for more than a general and obscure answer, make it concrete by asking yourself what prevents you in this place, at the present time, under the actual conditions in which you live, from conforming perfectly to your vocation. What is the obstacle, what constitutes the wall of separation between you and God, what advice would you give to some one else with a similar character, in a similar environment?

Perhaps you know the answer too well, but have not the courage to face it, owing to the sacrifice it entails. You will find strength in considering two great truths which we forget but too frequently. The first is this: "The grace of vocation furnishes us with sufficient strength and guarantees all the consolation we need." The second: "In return for every sacrifice we make, we receive Christ Himself and an increase of His love." The grace of vocation is so potent that we may aver with St. John Berchmans: "I shall always have the greatest confidence in the grace of my vocation." It is so fraught with consolation that it makes every hardship comparatively easy, while

it gives us no rest if we do not live up to the perfection of our state. By saying that we receive in return Jesus Himself, we mean that we are admitted to a more intimate familiarity with Him, are drawn more closely to Him, so that with the Apostle whom Jesus loved we may repose upon His Sacred Heart. Every Communion will grow in sweetness if we say in truth: "I have naught, dear Lord, but Thee."

2) We are also provided with means to console others who have met with adversity or feel keenly the sacrifices attendant upon a truly Christian life. Let us say to them: "God has assuredly placed a heavy cross upon your shoulders; He demands something very difficult, but what will you receive in return? Jesus, His love and powerful aid. Go to Him, kneel before the tabernacle, pour out your heart to Him, approach the holy table to obtain comfort, strength and greater love. The love of Jesus will surmount every difficulty."

II. THE MOST EXCELLENT WORK OF THE HOLY GHOST. In the first creation "the Spirit of God moved over the waters" (Gen. 1,2). And when the Son of God came into the world, the same Spirit descended upon Mary and wrought the Incarnation of the Divine Word. He formed His body in the womb of the pure Virgin. By the very fact that this body did not originate through ordinary generation, the soul was free from all stain of original sin, without need of cleansing as in our case, or of preservation as in the case of Mary. As the first Adam was formed by the hand of God from earth and undesecrated by sin, so the human

nature of the second Adam was formed by the Holy Spirit in the inviolate Virgin.

If Christ was "beautiful above all the sons of men" (Ps. 44,3), nevertheless the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit did not consist in this, but in equipping the soul of the God-Man with all natural and supernatural gifts unlike those ever received by a human being. In virtue of the human intellect which He gave Him, the Son of God was to see His Father; with the heart He bestowed upon Him, He was to love His Father; with the human will, He was to serve His Father from His very entrance into life. This Son of Man was to be King of patriarchs and prophets, Teacher of the world, Savior of mankind. He was to be the Sovereign of God's Kingdom on earth, Judge of the living and the dead. He was to be the Divine Majesty adored by the angels, feared by the demons; He was to be the well-beloved Son of the Father, the Source of all graces and mercies destined for mankind by the bounty of God.

Consequently, the Holy Ghost bestowed upon the human nature of Christ not only the so-called "substantial holiness," which results from the hypostatic union of that nature with the Second Person of the most holy Trinity, but a superabundance of created graces, habitual and actual, of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the constant, immediate vision of God, which we shall enjoy in Heaven, without, however, granting all its attendant consequences, as incapability of suffering, immortality and the like. To all these He added the dignities of supreme High-Priest, Teacher,

King, the gift of infused knowledge, impeccability, and integrity. The human nature of the Savior is in reality the masterpiece of God, and though in its essence inferior to the natural dignity of the angels, it surpasses them in supernatural gifts and prerogatives.

*Applications.* 1) With the angels let us adore the Son of God made man; let us worship Him in His human and divine majesty; let us rejoice in the prerogatives with which the Holy Ghost has dowered Him, and in the honor which has accrued to us and to all mankind because He made Himself one with us and at the same time became the glorious head of the human family. When a human being is raised to a high dignity, some of his glory is naturally reflected upon the members of his family and great advantages are often accorded his relatives in consequence of his power and influence. But this is only a faint image of the honor and privileges which our race and each individual has received through the Incarnation. According to some theologians the cause of the rebellion of Lucifer and the other fallen angels was the jealousy they experienced upon realizing the dignity and advantages mankind was to receive by this mystery. Be that as it may, this opinion is correctly motivated. In Heaven we shall have a full appreciation of the honor and benefits which flow to us because Christ is our brother. Let us give thanks to the Holy Ghost for all the favors He has bestowed upon mankind.

Let us rejoice in particular that our vocation brings us close to Christ. Let us be grateful to the Holy Spirit for all the gifts and graces imparted to us through Christ; let us entreat Him to adorn our hearts with the quali-

fications which our vocation requires, above all with a large measure of sanctifying grace, which makes us children of God and brothers of Christ.

2) This also teaches us the correct evaluation of temporal goods and blessings. The dignity of the Divine Person with whom the nature of Christ was to be united demanded that this nature be not only the ideal of everything that is of value and perfection in man, but that it be equipped with everything that is of worth and adornment for a creature. As before remarked, although human nature is in essence inferior to that of the angels, nevertheless a man who is at the same time a Divine Person, becomes by this very fact Lord of Creation, and even if God were to create beings far surpassing the angels in nature, they too, would be subject to Christ. Therefore, the treasures of God's omnipotence are, so to say, exhausted for the proper endowment of the God-Man. But in the selection of all that is precious, Divine Wisdom disregards, nay rejects, as dross and worthless ornament whatever the world deems great and costly. It systematically deprives the family in whose midst the Savior will come into the world, of the last vestige of wealth, honor, comfort and influence. It is a family in reduced circumstances, a family that through the sins and follies of its members has sunk so low politically, socially and economically that a miserable workshop is all the foster-father of the Lord can call his own. It is held in so slight repute, even in contempt by its own people that the Savior is born by the wayside in a place intended as a temporary shelter for cattle. But in the supernatural sense, how rich

is that child! O, that we might learn from this the correct evaluation of things! Let us implore this grace.

III. THE GREATEST PROOF OF THE LOVE OF THE SON. The grandeur of the work of the Holy Spirit finds a parallel in the sublime condescension of the Son. The more He abased Himself, the greater love did He manifest. But all the details of His birth, the poverty and obscurity of Bethlehem, the sufferings and subjection to the law which begin the first days of His earthly career, are but a feeble indication of His abasement in the Incarnation. In the Te Deum we say: "Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem non horruisti virginis uterum," "assuming human nature to free us, Thou didst not disdain the virgin's womb." St. Paul summarizes it: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God: but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, and in habit found as a man" (Phil. 2,6.7). Do we realize what we say in the Credo: "Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est?" God a human being, a creature! His is the form of a servant, but not in the glory of Eden, the earthly paradise, like Adam immortal, free from suffering, king of creation,—no, in the likeness of sinful flesh, as St. Paul says (Rom. 8,3), mortal, in suffering and labors from His very youth, "the last of men," as Isaias calls Him. Thus has the Word become flesh. What depth of condescension for love of us, and in view of our sins!

*Applications.* 1) It is meet, indeed, for us to bend the knee at mention of the Incarnation of the Divine Word in the Credo and in the last Gospel. This is indeed God's greatest work. The human mind marvels at the magnitude of this divine act. The eternal Son, of infinite majesty, dwelt as man among the children of men, subject to all the limitations of human kind. Yet, this act of supreme love, "having been found in habit like a man," has become for millions of pseudo-Christians a reason to deny His Divinity. How zealous, therefore, should His followers, especially priests and religious be in according Him the honor to which He has a just claim as a Divine Person, in spreading not only theoretical but practical belief in His Divinity. What reverence do we pay Him in the Eucharist, which is the renewal not only of His passion and death, but of His Incarnation? How is our deportment, what our fervor in the sanctuary, and in our visits to the Blessed Sacrament? Do we consider it a grateful duty to visit Him often, at least once a day, in the sacrament of His love?

In view of the widespread denial of His Divinity, we should in these visits make formal protestation of our faith, using the words of St. Peter lately enriched with a special indulgence: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God."

2) By the prophet and the great apostle of the Gentiles, Christ tells us the prayer He said at the moment of the Incarnation: "When he cometh into the world, he saith: Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not: but a body thou hast fitted to me. Holocausts for sin did not please thee. Then I said: Behold I come: in the head of

the book it is written of me: that I should do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10,5–7). In return for this generous oblation, let us frequently renew the offering we made to Him when we determined to follow His call, when the bishop's hands rested upon our heads, when we received the habit, when we made our profession, the resolution to belong to Him, to follow Him.

COLLOQUY. Sincere thanks to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost for all benefits received through the Incarnation; for the vocation to a life in which we receive the plenitude of blessings, for all graces given us in the past and destined for us in the future. With Saint Paul let us adore the great mystery of the Incarnation: "O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God. How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable are his ways. For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him and recompense shall be made to him? For of him, and by him, and in him, are all things; to him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11,33–36). Let us make anew our oblation to Christ after having professed our faith in His divinity; let us pray for grace to accomplish it.

## Meditation 5

### JESUS, THE SON OF THE VIRGIN

### (Matt. 1,18–25)

"Now the generation of Christ was in this wise. When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child, of the Holy Ghost. Whereon Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately.

"But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spake by the prophet, saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. And Joseph rising up from his sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. And he knew her not till she brought forth her first-born son: and called his name Jesus."

According to the Israelitic law and in the opinion of the Jews, Jesus was the son of Joseph. He be-

longed, therefore, not only to the descendants of Abraham as an Israelite in the possession of all their rights, but to the family of David, like Joseph His legal father. In reality, of course, he was "the promised son of David," and not the son of Joseph. For in bygone days Isaias speaking in the name of God, had given king Achaz a sign for the fulfilment of the promise of salvation: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (Isaias 7,14).

The son of David is to be distinguished from all men directly on His entrance into the world by having for mother an inviolate virgin. Providence, therefore, supplied at His birth a faithful and incorruptible witness that this prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus, the son of Mary. This divinely appointed witness is Joseph of Nazareth, the husband of the Virgin. Joseph had to purchase the honor of this testimony by bitter heartache, but since he has been tried as gold in the fire, his testimony cannot be impugned. Knowing that he was not the father of the child, conscientious and faithful as he was in the observance of all the precepts of the law, God's order alone could prevail upon him to accept the position of father of this child and to give it His name. Thus he is the divinely-destined witness that Mary is a virgin-mother, and that Christ is the Son of the Virgin of whom Isaias spoke, of the child who according to the prophet is "Emmanuel," Jesus, God-Savior, "who shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1,21).

Mary and Joseph endured hours of bitterness, but their anxiety was to serve Divine Providence in carrying out plans to indicate their honor; for they suffered much for the salvation of the world.

Let us ask for the grace to imitate Mary and Joseph by entrusting ourselves to the guidance of God, to accept from His hand the cross which He imposes upon us through others, even through those who are near and dear to us. The cross will be transformed into richest blessings for us, contributing to the salvation of others and increasing the glory of God.

1. JOSEPH'S DOUBT. "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child. . . . Whereupon Joseph . . . was minded to put her away privately." Mary was espoused to Joseph. According to Jewish custom this espousal was a real marriage contract conferring upon the espoused persons all the rights and duties of matrimony. Therefore, every sin against it was equivalent in guilt and penalty to adultery. Moreover, the law imposed upon every one who had knowledge of such a crime, the duty of denouncing the guilty party to the authorities.

Joseph had not yet received Mary into his home when the mystery of the Incarnation was wrought in her. Therefore, when she returned after a sojourn with Elizabeth, the secret she had concealed from everyone to whom God had not revealed it, became mani-

fest. Not even Joseph knew what had happened; he now perceived that Mary was about to become a mother. Was it possible that a crime like adultery threatened the happiness of his life? It was a terrible blow. And Mary was silent; she too suffered intensely. One word of hers could have solved the doubt and banished all anxiety, but that word she never uttered. God alone would vindicate her. Humility prevented her from revealing that she was the Mother of God, that the greatest miracle ever wrought in all creation had been accomplished in her. She realized, moreover, that everything was in the hands of God, and in this assurance she could rest.

Joseph was at a loss for an explanation; he was deeply troubled and perplexed, and he had to face a hard, relentless fact. More distressing still was ignorance of his obligation in the present critical situation. He struggled against suspicion, but circumstantial evidence was against Mary and he did not know whether the law permitted him to shield the obvious guilt from the public eye or even to maintain silence regarding it. He resorted to this expedient: he would leave all to God by withdrawing without taking further measures. He well knew that this would compromise his happiness. He must be on his guard, however, not to endanger Mary by this procedure or occasion gossip. He decided upon a private separation without giving any reason. This resolve was worthy of a man so faithful to the law, so unselfish, so tactful, so considerate of others.

*Applications.* 1) Mary and Joseph exemplify the truth that the cross is a sure sign of the Savior's presence. No more painful trial than theirs can be imagined. How inspiring their example! Should we not imitate them by being heroic in suffering? They suffer patiently and silently, neither interfering with the work of God nor taking the direction out of His hands. Satisfied with the testimony of a clear conscience, they submit to His guidance; obedient in all they do, and in all they refrain from doing, they are ready to suffer and forego whatever God wills.

While corporal pain is not so difficult to bear unless it is excessive, most people find it very hard to endure even moderate mental suffering and heartache silently and willingly, especially heartache caused by those near us or in our charge. Yet what a large share of such anguish comes into the lives of priests, teachers and superiors! Suffer silently, suffer patiently. Yes, suffer in silence, for nature is prone to reveal the heartache and disappointment torturing us. How much merit do we thus lose! Let us say with Isaias: "My secret to myself, my secret to myself" (Isaias 24,16). After all, there is very little relief in thus unburdening ourselves. As a rule God so disposes it that those to whom we complain, do not understand us or are not sympathetic. Suffer in silence. Suffer patiently; do not complain about your trouble and give way to despondency and listlessness. With God's help, you can carry the cross. When weak and disheartened, go to the Savior for strength and help.

2) Mary and Joseph teach us lessons of prudence and circumspection. Mary is silent at all times and in all places in regard to her secret, her divine mystery, not only

through motives of humility, but because she is prudent. She never refers to it unless God makes it known first, as He did to Elizabeth. We find that all saints favored by God with extraordinary graces never speak of them unless obliged by obedience. It is plain that the tendency to advertise oneself as the recipient of special favors of Heaven is not only grave reason for suspicion, but certain proof of fraud and deception perpetrated by the alleged privileged person or by the evil spirit. This silence shows that Mary is the virgin most prudent. She considers reticence her sacred duty and allows Joseph to endure anguish in spite of her sincere love for him and the representation of human prudence that he had a right to an explanation. She exposes herself to all the consequences which may ensue from this silence in regard to herself and those dear to her.

Joseph, too, avoids the slightest deviation from the path of duty, nor does he take further action against Mary or others involved in the case than his duty warrants. He upholds Mary's reputation not only by discreet silence but by banishing every suspicion or suggestion of suspicion. His method of dealing with his conscience about the law against an adultress demonstrates beyond doubt that he condemns no one, because he has no conclusive evidence of guilt, and leaves all judgment to the omniscient God. One thing only does conscience prevent, that is the guaranty of the innocence of all connected with the case in the eyes of the law. This is why he intends to withdraw without explanation.

Opportunities for the practice of similar virtues will not be lacking in our lives, especially silence and avoidance of rash judgments when appearances are against us. How

much harm is wrought by suspicion! How many saints were innocent victims of suspicion engendered in the minds not only of malicious worldlings, but of their own religious brethren or other devout persons! How often were falsehoods, calumnies, circulated about them! To avoid this vice, fundamentally strong Christian virtue is essential.

3) Should we become the victims of suspicion, let us not be disheartened. It is the common fate of those who wish to serve the Lord with their entire heart and strength. Satan knows only too well that there is scarcely a more efficient means of frustrating God's work than to create suspicion against His minister. Suspicion will make people rise up against him, or he will give way to discouragement. The most serious obstacle which the Jesuit martyrs in North America experienced in their work among the Indians was suspicion. This vice is not, however, a monopoly of the Indians. When we feel its crushing weight, let us in imitation of Mary and Joseph, have recourse to God, the Defender of the innocent.

II. SOLUTION OF THE DOUBT. "But while he thought on these things behold the angel appeared to him in sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins."

In this instance, Mary and Joseph valiantly endured suffering in the service of God and He would not fail to intervene. They made their self-oblation in silence

with fidelity and obedience similar to that of Abraham when, at the command of God, he was about to sacrifice Isaac his son, sole heir of the divine promises. As on Mount Moriah an angel intercepted the fatal blow, so here a celestial messenger again intervenes before anything happens contrary to divine ordinance. The heavenly envoy addresses Joseph: "Joseph, son of David." This is in recognition of Joseph's loyalty; for David was a man after God's heart, faithful and true. This salutation is a hint that in fulfilment of the sublime promise made to David's house, Heaven wishes to deal with Joseph as a worthy representative of his illustrious ancestor, and assign to him a special task.

But the sacrifice for which Joseph is in readiness is unnecessary: "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife." These few words remove from the mind of Joseph the burden of doubt. However, he is destined for a more exalted mission than ever entered his humble, artless mind: he is to hear tidings of so great significance as to surpass all that has hitherto been heard by a mortal. Mary, his spouse, is not only pure and innocent, but she is the spouse of the Holy Ghost, and Joseph is to be her guardian and protector. How different from what Joseph had feared!

Yet this is not all of the angel's commission; the highest and most important part is still to come. Mary who has conceived of the Holy Spirit will bear a son, and Joseph shall "call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The great son of David, the promised Redeemer, is about to enter the

world; He is "Jesus," that is God-Savior, a Divine Person, and Joseph is to be His foster-father. This is implied in his being delegated to give the child His divinely-chosen name. Whose place is Joseph to take? The place of God the Father. For whom is he to be the representative of the Eternal Father? For a Divine Person. Such an honor was not bestowed upon Abraham or David, and they as well as the other ancestors of the humble carpenter must acknowledge his preferment. Joseph is the greatest of the patriarchs, "light of patriarchs," as he is called in the litany; for he alone is foster-father of Christ and guardian of the Virgin.

*Applications.* 1) If we sympathize with Mary and Joseph in their great anxiety, we may also rejoice with them in the relief and still more in the dignity bestowed upon them. With what holy awe must we look up to Saint Joseph! And he unites with us in greater reverence to Mary. But they have not received this dignity for themselves alone. As the Redeemer is the cause of their painful doubts, He is also the source of their greatness.

Mary and Joseph carried their cross and made sacrifices for Jesus and for us whom He has come to redeem. For Him and for us they accepted the honorable but difficult positions at His right and left. They are and always will be interested in us, in Holy Church, the mystical body of Christ, and in every soul whose Redeemer they nurtured and protected amid cares and labors. If in the Savior we seek freedom from sin, relief in suffering, reassurance in doubt, we shall find Him in the company

of Mary and Joseph. "Per Mariam ad Jesum," "through Mary to Jesus," is a time-honored aspiration, above all for those who wish to lead a truly spiritual life. Saint Joseph has come into his own by public veneration in the Church, but we must not forget that he was ever the patron of the interior life. Let us implore his intercession in his twofold office.

2) "When the need is greatest, God is nearest." This consoling proverb finds unique illustration and proof in this instance. God knows exactly when to help, and His aid is always timely. For wise reasons, however, He frequently does not render assistance in the beginning of our troubles. He had good reasons to allow the anxiety of these two holy persons to reach a crisis. He has also good reasons to delay help in our difficulties. He affords us an opportunity to practice heroic confidence. By this very trouble He draws us closer to Him, convinces us of our weakness, establishes us in humility and purifies our intention. Let us profit by the lesson He gives us so that with renewed confidence we may resolve "to lose our lives rather than confidence in Him."

III. IMPORT OF THE DOUBT. "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying: "Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is God with us."

The sorrow that Joseph experienced had its purpose in the designs of God. Joseph's doubt was of the same importance for Christ's virginal birth as the

doubt of Saint Thomas was for the Resurrection. Joseph was among the first to whom the Incarnation of the Son of God was revealed. Everything had to happen as it did: first the doubt, then the solution. His fear and anxiety when he became aware of Mary's condition, prove conclusively that Jesus is not the son of Joseph. His sorrow and resolution manifest his conscientiousness and absolute obedience to the law. He knows his duty in case of a crime, and painful though it be, he is ready to comply with his obligation with the utmost delicacy, but with unflinching fidelity. If without scruple he takes Mary into his home as spouse; if without hesitation he assumes the position and duty of a father and gives his name to that Child whose coming has caused him untold grief and anxiety, it is absolutely certain that Mary has not become the victim of sin but has remained an inviolate virgin. Consequently the child in her womb is not the fruit of adultery but of the Holy Ghost; for "Joseph knew her not till she brought forth her first-born son."

It is likewise certain, as the angel explains to Joseph, that in Mary the prophecy is fulfilled: "A virgin shall be with child and bear a son and his name is Emmanuel." Joseph gives the Divine Child the name of Jesus, that is God-Savior, for He is the Savior, and He is God. Heaven has revealed it to Joseph, and he is to bear witness to it before men.

*Applications.* 1) God does not send crosses and afflictions without reason; they are intended to serve His

designs. The greater the suffering, the greater the designs of God. The higher the position for which He has chosen a person and the more intimate that person's relation to Christ is to be, the more must he be tried and tested by sufferings and be prepared for his task by crosses. Our limited intellect can not comprehend the plans of God, but if we stand the test of the cross, His purposes will be accomplished in us and through us. They all concern our own salvation and that of the world. Mary and Joseph had to suffer for the fulfilment of the great Messianic promise and they have become the first in the Kingdom of Heaven by their patient suffering. They endured without any guilt of their own; their cross was heavy, but "the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come" (Rom. 8,18).

The priest and the religious are also close to the Savior. Their position resembles that of the mother and the foster-father of the Savior. Therefore they must be pure as Mary, faithful as Joseph, and yet in spite of these virtues, adversity will overtake them too, partly because the world can not be saved except through the cross, partly because the powers of hell will not be inactive and indifferent witnesses to the inroads which the ministers of Christ make upon their domain, without vowing revenge, the vengeance of trickery, misrepresentation, suspicion, false charges. And if the greatest sorrow befalls the apostle of Christ, if despite his innocence and fidelity his very office becomes the object of attack, he must learn from Mary and Joseph to suffer in silence and to perform his duties quietly and fearlessly. He must not expect the cross to assume any extraordinary guise in order to be immediately recognized as a divine visitation, or bear the halo

of martyrdom. On the contrary, it usually takes an ordinary form, seems natural and commonplace, and is indeed often nothing but the result of human malice, shortsightedness, or ignorance. Apparently God had nothing to do with it, nor can it promote His glory. It did not occur to Joseph to await divine intervention when he had to decide upon a course of duty towards Mary who was to become a mother, but God's providence dominated all. The cross will serve the glory of God, the salvation of men and the happiness here and hereafter of the afflicted, maligned minister of the Lord.

2) Of all sacrifices one of the hardest for a priest or religious to bear is to be under distrust or suspicion, to lose his good name. For what else have we in this world if we are consecrated to the special service of God? Material goods and pleasures are no longer ours. Our good reputation is all that we can really call our own. When God demands the sacrifice, we are called upon to relinquish everything that, humanly speaking, is worth living for. Usually this sacrifice does not consist in public disgrace, but in being thought little of or even suspected by those who are in authority over us and by others with whom we have to live and work. How many saints have had to make this sacrifice! Even great Saint Francis Xavier seems to have been misunderstood for a while by St. Ignatius, his father and best friend, who expostulated with him about the method he followed in his great apostolate. Let us be convinced that if a trial of this kind befalls us, our work for God's glory and the salvation of souls will not be impaired. The momentous task of Mary and Joseph was not hindered by that terrible

doubt. It is possible that God wishes us to work for souls in some other way than we had planned. Even when the apparent harvest of souls that we are destined to garner, is blighted, real and lasting results are not diminished. For souls are not saved only or principally by the external work of the apostle but by the inner ministry of sacrifice and prayer. On judgment day we shall have to alter many of our opinions concerning persons who actually saved souls. We shall discover that often not he to whose words they listened or who heard their confession has been their real savior, but some one else who suffered for them, prayed for them, unseen and unnoticed, in truth a hidden martyr.

COLLOQUY. Oblation to Christ and petition for strength, fidelity, and fortitude in suffering. "In the daytime the Lord hath commanded his mercy; and a canticle to him in the night. With me is the prayer to the God of my life. I will say to God: Thou art my support. Why hast thou forgotten me? and why go I mourning, while my enemy afflicteth me? Whilst my bones are broken, my enemies who trouble me have reproached me. Whilst they say to me day by day: Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in thy God, for I will give praise to him: the salvation of my countenance, and my God." (Ps. 41,9–12).

## Meditation 6

### PROMISE AND FULFILMENT

(Matt. 1,1–25) (See Meditations 1–5)

By proposing the genealogy of Christ the evangelist has given us the progenitors of the Savior in Israel, beginning with the promise made to Abraham. With the reign of David the king he marks a new period, pointing to another era that sets in with the Babylonian captivity, and ends with "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

He next proves that Jesus is not only called but must be acknowledged as the Christ of whom David and the prophets have spoken. It is, therefore, not an empty assertion when in the very first words of his gospel the evangelist proposes the genealogy of Jesus as "the book of the generation of the Christ," whom Israel had expected for centuries.

History, as recorded in the names of Abraham's descendants, in the kings that followed David and in the successors of Jechonias, shows gross infidelity to God. But has all the virtue for which the Almighty made Abraham and David recipients of glorious prom-

ises and intermediaries of blessings, entirely disappeared in Israel? No; for at His entrance into the world the Messias finds a man just as Abraham, God-fearing as David, untainted by the sins of his people; he finds Joseph, who by his modesty and simplicity is the worthy heir of Abraham and David, deserving to be the foster-father of the Redeemer.

On that man's testimony the evangelist can base the demand that Israel acknowledge Jesus to be the Christ.

Let us entreat the grace to learn from Joseph how to make ourselves fit instruments in the hand of God to win the world for Christ and the faith.

I. JOSEPH, JUST. Nowhere does Abraham's greatness appear so clearly as when in blind obedience he is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, only heir of the promises, and still his conviction remains unshaken that God will be faithful to His word though all depends upon the life of the youth. He does not know how the fulfilment will be accomplished, but he trusts implicitly and makes the sacrifice. This heroic act is followed by the solemn confirmation of all the divine promises: "By mine own self have I sworn, saith the Lord: because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only begotten son for my sake; I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and as the sands by the seashore: thy seed shall possess the gates of thy enemies. And in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed, because thou

hast obeyed my voice." (Gen. 22,16–18). The test to which Joseph is subjected is not easier, nor does it find him less faithful to the commands of God than Abraham was. Justice, that is fidelity to the law of Moses, directs all his actions. Yet, while Abraham's sacrifice was directly and personally demanded by God Himself, it appeared that Joseph was forced by the crime of a human being to sacrifice her who was nearest and dearest to him. How careless had his ancestors frequently been concerning the sacredness of matrimony! How often had they yielded to the lust of the flesh, although God curbed the promptings of passion by the natural law and by special precepts. This was not the case with Joseph. He did penance for their crimes, when he faced the painful alternative of making the hardest sacrifice or of violating the law which protected the holiness of the married state. He did not waver a moment. His sole perplexity was what the law of God demanded in the present situation. He was firmly resolved to obey to the best of his knowledge, to make any sacrifice, to forego even the happiness of life, if conscience demanded it. Joseph was a very worthy descendant of Abraham, heir of his faith, trust and obedience.

Says Saint Paul of Abraham: Father of the faithful, he hoped against hope and believed in God's promise; . . . he was not weak in faith. To this constancy in faith and hope, the apostle attributes the patriarch's position in the order of grace. (Cf. Rom. 4,16 ff.). Like Abraham, Joseph owes his great dig-

nity to his firm faith and trust in obedience. Neither pleasure nor pain could make either of these patriarchs swerve from the path indicated by God. For this reason they became patriarchs, Abraham of the Messias and all the faithful, Joseph patriarchal foster-father of Christ, guardian of His family. Both point out to us the road to true greatness, to greatness that counts in the sight of God.

*Applications.* 1) Every person called by God to greater sanctity and to more than ordinary labor for the salvation of souls in the sanctuary, in the classroom, at the sick-bed, in reformatories or elsewhere will time and again be obliged to do what seems to jeopardize his happiness and take all joy out of his life. He will have to walk through intense darkness, to sacrifice one as beloved as Isaac, and apparently be doomed to distress and bereavement. God will not reveal to him that "he quickeneth the dead and calleth the things that are not as those that are" (Rom. 4,17). If the sacrifice is made with abiding trust in God and firm faith in the things that are not seen, a new aspect of life will open for him. How much happier and holier was the life of Mary and Joseph after the period of doubt and desolation through which they had passed in justice, obedience to God, confidence in Him and fidelity to their recognized duty! God often works by opposites; what appears to human reason a certain route to misery and failure, is for Him the safe way to happiness and success. Let us follow the path God assigns us, not in inert resignation but with lively faith and steadfast hope that it will not lead to darkness, misery, despair, but to the peace and joy of the children of God. This is part of the more perfect

faith which they must practice who have been called to a higher life. It will not conduce to their detriment even on earth.

2) From the example of Joseph we also learn not to anticipate difficulties or sacrifices beyond those associated with the present task. A great temptation in such circumstances is to look too far ahead, not indeed heavenward, but within the confines of disagreeable environs. Let us be satisfied with present duty and refrain from speculation about the consequences which the sacrifice now demanded of us will have in the future. The future is in God's hands and things will appear different eventually from the picture which our troubled mind now conjures up.

II. JOSEPH, PURE. "And Joseph rising up from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had told him, and took to him his wife; and he knew her not until she brought forth her (first-born) son."

Since the evangelist wants to emphasize the fact that Jesus has no human father, but is the son of a virgin, he states that Joseph did not make use of his matrimonial rights before the birth of Christ. But by saying that "he knew her not till she brought forth a son," St. Matthew does not imply that later on Joseph availed himself of his rights. The conjunction "until" can be used in two significations. It may express the limit beyond which something is not done or not to be done, as when we say: "Wait till I come"; "the boat did not sink until all were saved." It may also be used merely to denote that up to a certain point

something is done or to be done, without considering what is done or to be done afterwards; as when we say that the Blessed Virgin lived in the state of grace until she died. We do not imply that she lost sanctifying grace after death, we speak only of her life on earth and leave her life after death out of consideration. The words of the evangelist concerning the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph render us certain that until the birth of Christ they did not use their privilege; how they acted afterwards, can not be ascertained from this text, but only from other sources. Mary and Joseph indeed lived in a virginal marriage not only till Christ was born, but all the time. The original Greek does not say "till she brought forth her first-born son," but simply "till she brought forth her son." Jesus is called the first-born son of Mary not because His birth was followed by that of other children, but because in Israel the first-born son occupied a unique position in the family, and fell heir to all the rights and dignities of his father. As heir of Abraham and David, Jesus had to be a first-born son.

Although Joseph never doubted the purity and innocence of Mary, nevertheless he feared to be contaminated by the sin of another, under which supposition he labored until informed of the miraculous manner in which his spouse had been blessed with a child. For the law of Moses declared that a husband living with a wife that had been betrayed by another man was guilty of adultery. His love of purity attained supreme heights not only in the resolution to leave his betrothed,

but because he was the first of the saints to combine virginity with the married state.

Theologians justly infer from the words of Mary to Gabriel when he announced that she was to be the Mother of God (Luke 1,34) that both she and St. Joseph had made a vow of virginity. Their forefathers had often violated the virtue of chastity even in the state of matrimony, and concupiscence of the flesh had wrought great havoc in the world. What is the cause of this sin? Man seems unable to give his heart to God entirely and unreservedly. Do we presume to say even in our own times that all those who take the vow of chastity give their heart to God alone? Mary and Joseph could say with greater truth than the royal psalmist, their ancestor: "What have I in heaven and without thee what do I desire on earth? Thou art the God of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 72,25.26).

*Applications.* 1) Almighty God alone can render man happy. This truth is understood by comparatively few. Divine grace has enabled us to fathom its meaning. If we are fully determined to keep the sacred obligation imposed by our explicit or implicit vow of chastity and to attain the perfection of this virtue, we must give our hearts entirely to God, excel in love of Him and beware of merely natural affections. It may perhaps be possible to fulfil the essential obligations of this vow without detachment from creatures, but without it angelic purity is unattainable. He who wishes to emulate the purity of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, of Aloysius, Agnes and the other heroes and heroines of

purity, must give his whole heart to God and love all other creatures only for His sake.

2) It was precisely because Joseph's heart belonged to God alone that the Divine Child and His mother could be safely entrusted to him. To the care of the priest God confides Jesus in the Eucharist; Jesus, who is to be formed in the hearts of men, in the hearts of youth, in the hearts of sinners, in the hearts of the dying; He entrusts this charge also to every one who has an apostolic vocation. Let us be worthy of the trust by great purity of heart not only in regard to concupiscence of the flesh, but with reference to every sin and inordinate affection, so that in all our dealings with men we may seek only the honor of the Savior and the welfare of souls. Devotion to the Mother of God and to Saint Joseph are efficacious means to obtain purity.

III. JOSEPH THE HUSBAND OF MARY. The glory of Abraham and the splendor of David had departed, when Joseph, tortured by doubts and reassured by an angel, was commanded to take Mary, the spouse of the Holy Ghost, into his house, to give her Son His name, and to be His foster-father. But while Joseph possessed all the virtues which made Abraham and David pleasing to God, he had to live in a state of social degradation. His forebears had committed heinous crimes, above all idolatry, and their posterity but too eagerly followed the example of their rulers and too readily availed themselves of the license they sanctioned. Finally, not only in the kingdom of Israel but in that of Juda only a few were found who "had not

bent their knee to Baal, Astarte, and Moloch." Misery and suffering alone could bring them to their senses and back to God. As they had preferred earthly things to God, He finally deprived them of all temporal splendor, opulence and even liberty. He made them slaves of the pagan nations with whom they always entered anew into negotiations against His express command.

Joseph felt the chastening hand of God with the rest of his nation and he had to suffer from the greater severity with which it afflicted the house of David, which had forfeited royalty and had fallen into poverty, obscurity and oblivion. On account of the crimes of his ancestors, he was deprived of influence and renown and was forced to earn his livelihood by a humble trade. Though laboring under the double curse upon his nation and his family, he is "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called the Christ." This dignity more than counterbalanced the degradation incurred by the sins of others, and this dignity was bestowed upon him because he was a tried and generous servant of God.

*Applications.* 1) It may, and often does, happen that the sins and errors of those with whom we have to live and work evoke the punishment of God, or an evil inflicted by men strikes us though innocent, together with those who have deserved it. It is but natural for us to feel keenly the disgrace and suffer grievously under the visitation, but we should bear in mind that it does not abase us in the sight

of God nor detract from our real worth, It should be an incentive to seek God's will alone and to be more zealous in His service. If we bear tribulation in the proper spirit, we make God in a way our debtor, and He will recompense us liberally, though often not by removing the trial. Let us neither censure those who occasioned it nor harbor resentment. Aversion, though very natural, will only increase our suffering. When Joseph beheld Jesus and Mary, did he blame anyone for his poverty and humiliation? Does any one today think less of him, elevated to the dignity of the greatest patriarch, because he was once a poor carpenter? He is the best example of the reward which God bestows upon obedience, faith, fear of God, entire devotedness to Him. Let us recall this consoling truth when we are constrained to practise these virtues amid conditions difficult and disagreeable on account of the faults of the associates whom Providence has destined for us.

2) There is another lesson which applies to us who have charge of souls and which it is advisable to keep in mind. Let us not condemn or despise any one because he belongs to a family or other social group disgraced by unworthy members. If great saints like Mary and Joseph could spring from a family as notorious as was that of David, and from a nation so perverse as Israel, it shows the power of the grace of God. Let us deal individually with individuals, and not condemn a person at the outset because his family has had a bad reputation.

COLLOQUY. Prayer to Saint Joseph that he may teach us to imitate his example by ready obedience to God, conscientious avoidance of sin and patient en-

durance of the lot imposed by Divine Providence, that we may attain to God's pleasure and reward. "Help us, Joseph, in our earthly strife, Ever to lead a pure and blameless life."

## Part II

### THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF CHRIST

### Meditation 7

### THE MAGI IN QUEST OF THE KING OF THE JEWS

### (Matt. 2,1–6)

"When Jesus, therefore, was born in Bethlehem of Juda in the days of king Herod, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him. And king Herod hearing this was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda. For it is so written by the prophet: And thou, Bethlehem in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people of Israel."

The "fullness of time" has arrived; the Messias has appeared in Israel. But the Evangelist begins the account of His manifestations to the world with—the Gentiles. A star appeared to the Magi in the Orient

and announced to them, strangers, the birth of the King of Juda. They bring the first tidings to Jerusalem, but their message far from causing universal jubilation is received in the capital with fear and forebodings by king and people. And yet, the Savior has been promised first of all to the Jews. They are the sole appointed guardians and custodians of the Old Testament. It is for this reason that the Magi must find out at Jerusalem whether their interpretation of the star is correct, and where they shall look for Christ. What a striking contrast between the Gentiles and the Jews! Gentiles have to announce to Jerusalem that its King has been born. For centuries, Israel has expected Him, and now the news of His birth fills all hearts with fear and terror.

Let us implore God to give us a willing heart that like the Magi we may receive His graces and not forfeit them as the Jews did, nor while directing others miss the goal ourselves.

I. THE MAGI AND THE STAR. "When therefore Christ was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem saying: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, (or rather: "in its rise, when it arose." The Greek and Latin text have the same word for East and the rising of the star) and are come to adore him." Much as legend tells about the three kings, the

gospel contains but scant information concerning them. They inquire about the King of the Jews, hence they are not Jews. Scripture does not specify their number, country or nationality, nor whether they possessed royal dignity. They were "Magi," not jugglers and soothsayers like Simon the Magician (Acts 8,9), of whom a large number in those days roamed about in the Greco-Roman world. Nor were they like Elymas or Bar-Jesu, a false prophet who tried to prevent Sergius Paulus, pro-consul of Cyprus, from accepting the teaching of Saint Paul (Acts 13,6 ff.). They were from the East, where in Babylonia, Assyria and Persia the Magi were respected priests who devoted themselves to astronomy and kindred sciences.

They saw the star of the King of the Jews in its rise. From this star they learned of His birth and they came to pay Him homage. God had taken care to make them understand the meaning of the star, but the Gospel does not tell us how He did this. Their message from the star contained an invitation to go in quest of Him and worship Him. How this was done, we do not know. It is certain that they saw the star and understood its purport; they heeded its call and came to Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. Here they inquired about the king and stated the object of their journey.

*Applications.* 1) God speaks to man in various ways, now through the world about him, again through interior inspirations. He accommodates Himself to every one in a

marvelous manner. Thus He gives His commandments amid thunder and lightning to those that have to be intimidated by the appearance of power and majesty; to others He speaks through angels; with some He communicates by signs and wonders; with others by the voice of nature reinforced by divine grace. Occasionally He reveals Himself in the events of history and men's individual experiences; at other times His voice is heard in the solitude of the heart. But at all times His is the way to salvation, often a wonderful way, even without external signs and wonders. Let us learn from the Magi to hearken to the voice of God that we may be able to understand His message. Let us strive to be faithful and obedient to His guidance; but to do this we must lead a life of recollection and be attentive to what transpires in our souls. Many an inspiration is lost on account of dissipation of mind or of being too much engrossed in external things. We are too restless and "are troubled about many things," as our Lord told Martha. (Luke 10,4).

Temporal concerns have too great an appeal for us. As the faithful reception of an inspiration prepares us for new lights, so its neglect causes God to be silent and to refrain from further communication. The "Imitation of Christ" contains many important suggestions on this point. (See e.g. II, 1,8; III, 1,53).

2) The road leads the Magi into a foreign country and an uncertain future, but nevertheless directly to Jesus. Wherever God may lead us, we shall never be confounded if we entrust ourselves to Him. He is our sure guide to salvation. But we must not only be attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit, sweet and gentle, but we must be ready to recognize the hand of God in what, humanly speaking,

is mere chance or the result of ignorance, frailty, cunning, aye, even malice on the part of men, and we must continue to trust in the loving, wise, all-powerful care of Providence.

II. THE MAGI IN JERUSALEM. "And king Herod hearing this was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born." We can picture in some degree the disappointment of the just and zealous men from the East when they arrived in Jerusalem. In Judea's capital they meet with nothing but the humdrum of everyday life, although but a few miles away in a suburb the greatest event of history has occurred. No one seems to think, much less to be anxious about what has been the desire and prayer of Abraham's pious descendants for nearly two thousand years. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are better acquainted with the most recent atrocity perpetrated by the tyrant from Idumea. They are totally engrossed in the cares of earth and the material needs of the hour.

Gentiles come from a great distance to call their attention to the great blessing with which God has favored them. Gentiles know that the Messias has been born, for they have seen His star. They too have awaited His coming, though He was not to be their king, but the king of the Jews. Willingly and cheerfully they have made the long journey expecting naught else in Jerusalem but universal rejoicing.

There is, however, no inkling of the great news. Shall not their message at least create a joyful stir? On the contrary, Israel is affrighted by the news that the mighty "king of the Jews" dwells among them, although we can infer from the ready answer of the priests and scribes to Herod's question, that every one understands full well the import of the message which concerns the Messias.

The Magi have joyfully followed the call of God; they have generously undertaken a long and arduous journey, and yet their first experience on arriving in the city of David is a bitter disappointment, but their faith and fidelity do not waver.

*Application.* We learn here a new procedure in God's direction of souls. It not infrequently happens that a person who is generously disposed has completed, at the cost of great labor and sacrifice, some task in the service of the Master; like the Magi of old, who gladly took upon themselves the inconveniences of a protracted journey, he awaits at least some slight recognition from the good God; but his reward often comes under the mask of disappointment, failure or trouble. A person of weak character will feel hurt, think his work is useless and succumb to dejection. And yet, the difficulty is but a token of divine approval and an earnest of greater graces that will be awarded at the opportune time. It is possible that if an obvious reward would crown labor, the human heart would be puffed up, merit would be lost, and in the conviction that enough has been accomplished, no further effort would be made. Let us familiarize ourselves with the ways

of God; they are so different from the methods of men, and instead of discouragement and diffidence, we shall valiantly continue the good work. Every cross is a grace, and every grace is a precious gift of God, and an intrinsically adequate reward.

III. JERUSALEM AND THE MAGI. "All Jerusalem (was troubled) with him." In itself, it is indeed a grave warning for the Jews to be apprised by the Gentiles of the Savior's birth. People in their very midst have known the wonderful tidings for over a year. Simeon, Anna even have seen the babe in the Temple. But, as St. Luke tells us, they "spoke only to a few that looked for the redemption of Israel." (Luke 2,38.)

Temporal cares and interests make the other inhabitants oblivious to the momentous happening, though the prophecy of Daniel is sufficiently clear. They are not prepared for it; hence those who have knowledge of it are silent, because they being in the minority, their influence with the masses is small. Does Israel now realize that it has missed the glorious part of its divine call? It is the opinion of commentators that the fear that befell them when they heard the words of the Magi was due not alone to their dread of Herod, but to the evil conscience which tormented them.

Even now they cannot rise to the gravity of the occasion nor to the dignity of their vocation. They should at least shake off their lethargy and welcome the Messias, because the Gentiles made a long and strenuous journey to render Him homage. But no, they visualize

only the penalties of Herod if they worship another king, even though He be Messias and King. Fear paralyzes them; for "King Herod hearing this trembled and all Jerusalem with him." Verily, the days of the Machabees, of Eleazar and all the other valiant men are past. Not a spark of the spirit of the martyrs is left in Israel, nor any confidence in the power of God, who in ages past so often came to their assistance when they were faithful to their vocation. Israel has struck deep roots, nay, seems submerged in things mundane.

*Applications.* 1) A crisis in human affairs and a momentous vocation demand a great man. We learn this from the Magi and also from the Jews. Whether priests or religious, ours is a sublime call. Heroes seem to be in demand now more than ever. The times in which we live, the prodigious problems of religion, the magnitude of the work being done by holy Church, the mighty efforts of the powers of darkness, the lamentable "laicization" to which Pius XI refers when instituting the feast of "Christ, the King," the spirit of rebellion against lawful authority, rampant immorality, rationalistic infidelity, make heroes imperative. As priests and religious we must realize the gravity of the situation and bring to bear upon it all the earnestness which springs from apostolic faith and zeal. Otherwise we shall be so absorbed in earthly concerns as to disregard the call of grace, and on account of our indolence or levity, make little progress in personal sanctification and accomplish still less for the salvation of souls. Let us not be captivated by the spirit of the age, which

lures men from the road hallowed by age-old traditions and the doctrine of the Saints. The regulations of the Church for priests as well as the religious constitutions and rules sanctioned by the Holy See, have not become obsolete. Our vocation is still subject to the same laws as those of our forefathers, because the end and aim has not been changed nor can it be altered, just as human nature can not differ in the twentieth century from what it has always been. It is therefore useful to examine how we observe the regulations of Canon Law and the diocesan statutes for priests, the constitutions and rules laid down for religious, to ascertain whether we live up to the spirit of our vocation, or whether we have digressed from it.

2) Besides this, all of us once or repeatedly in our lives have faced the alternative of rising to a higher plane of spirituality or of lapsing into mediocrity or tepidity. We find here an analogy to "the tides in the affairs of men," of which the poet speaks. If we miss the opportunity, we shall assuredly not remain as good as we were before, but shall inevitably sink to lower depths. God demands a sacrifice or sends us a trial. He wishes us to relinquish a position or work not only very agreeable to us, but in which we are achieving good results for souls; He urges us to undertake something for our own advancement and the salvation of our neighbor, that crosses our plans and is opposed to our temperament. This is the crucial hour of life in which we are challenged to be true to our vocation even at a risk like that which the Israelites should have taken the day the Magi announced the birth of the Savior. If we make the right choice, our progress in sanctity will be extraordinary; if we fail or remain irresolute

and inactive, our spirituality will thereafter be merely nominal. We may continue our usual religious practices and other devout observances, but they deteriorate into external formalities devoid of spirit and life. Our frail human nature shrinks from the sacrifice of surrendering what we like inordinately, and we hesitate to explore the steep path into unknown regions; but if we obey the call of God, we shall experience all the love and solicitude of the Sacred Heart.

Is there anything that can sweeten the bitterness of that cup and make renouncement easier? There is indeed. Above all, the powerful grace of God, which will surely be given in response to humble prayer. Then there is the sympathy of our Blessed Savior, the invitation of His Sacred Heart to come to Him when we labor and are heavily burdened. There is the clear understanding of our vocation, of the good that is at stake; there is great confidence in God and in the special grace of vocation, the determined will, the sweet intercourse with God which will be ours if we prove equal to the sacrifice demanded of us. The Israelites lacked all these; the Magi were heroes of the momentous occasion; they measured up to every requirement.

IV. THE PROPHECY. "But they (the chief priests and scribes) said to him (Herod): In Bethlehem of Juda. For it is so written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem in the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel."

Though the question of the Magi did not meet with an enthusiastic response nor encouragement in Jeru-

salem, they nevertheless secured the desired information. Frightened and assuming a neutral attitude, the Jews could not evade an answer to the inquiry. Herod convoked a meeting of the chief priests and scribes and asked them frankly where the Messias would be born. These men were the unworthy, yet divinely-appointed custodians of Israel's faith and hope; above all, they were depositaries of the sacred writings containing the divine promises. Therefore, they did not have to seek far for an answer. The question was not ambiguous and the answer which the prophet Micheas had given before the Babylonian captivity more than seven hundred years before, was equally plain and unmistakable. Bethlehem in the land of Juda, the old Ephrata, the home of David, was the place from which the Messias was to come. The seer (Micheas 5,2) not only clearly indicated the city of His birth, but praised and exalted it. His words, therefore, were a warning and a rebuke for the Jews, who succumbed to terror. Israel was to lead the Gentiles to the Messias, but to remain far away from Him itself.

*Applications.* 1) This is the ordinary way of God's guidance. Humanly speaking, it involves disappointment for the good and the wicked. But it leads every one who does not suffer himself to be misled, from darkness into light. But if he seeks anything except the will and direction of the Almighty, if he usurps the first place for self, substituting worldly interests for the will of God, he will stumble even in broad daylight. When we are puzzled by the ways of Providence, when perplexity besets us, we

must seek the guidance of others; for in this case we are as it were blindfolded, and groping in the dark we must fall. Happy is he who is not deceived in such circumstances, but submits to the lead of legitimate authority, even though it has something in common with the chief priests and scribes. For it is not the individual that guides us, but through the office he holds it is God Himself, and we may as safely follow this direction as the Magi could give credence to the answer of the Jewish custodians of the sacred books. Does not our Lord at a later time say of the Scribes and Pharisees that sit in the chair of Moses: "All things whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do; but according to their works do ye not; for they say and do not" (Matt. 23,3)? This is one of the most consoling truths of divine revelation: God guides us through His representatives in such a manner that though personally they may be inferior in wisdom and holiness, nevertheless their ordinances are directed by God. When Divine Providence requires us to obey a frail mortal, we cannot and will not suffer evil consequences.

The path may be shown by a star in the firmament, by a passage from Scripture or by the word of a creature; in every instance we must recognize the guidance of God, whom we obey. If our heart is not docile and obedient to the commands of the Lord, we shall never understand supernatural signs in human events nor follow His revealed precept.

2) A second important truth is exemplified in the conduct of the chief priests and scribes: The priest and religious must be aware that it is not their state, dignity or position as such that leads to salvation, but it is their

readiness to heed the word of God and to follow Him willingly. In our vocation we have a super-abundance of graces, but we must utilize them; otherwise we shall lose the Savior as the priests and scribes lost Him. Our work for souls will only increase our responsibility.

COLLOQUY. Prayer for the gift of understanding and readiness to follow divine guidance. "Send forth thy light and thy truth; they have conducted me, and brought me unto thy holy hill, and into thy tabernacles. And I will go unto the altar of God: to God, who giveth joy to my youth" (Ps. 42,3,4).

## Meditation 8

### THE JEWS AND THE KING OF THE JEWS

(Matt. 2,7–10)

"Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them, and sending them into Bethlehem said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again that I also may come and adore him. Who having heard the king, went their way. And behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

After hearing of the new-born King of the Jews, Herod quickly made his plans. He ascertained from the Jews the place in which the Messias was to be born, and from the Magi the time the star appeared. But in all this, he was but the agent of God to direct the Wise Men aright.

After they had left the tyrant, the star reappeared, to mark the place of the Savior's birth. They were filled with joy in the realization of the continued guidance of Heaven.

It is a consoling as well as an inspiring scene—the Wise Men nearing their goal. Jerusalem lies behind them, whence as from a lion's den, they narrowly escaped. Before them shines the star that leads to Christ. All around them is the stillness of night, emphasized by a clear and beautiful sky.

Let us ask for the grace to place ourselves always with great trust in the hands of God; for He will make even malice and deceit of men serve the welfare of those who love Him, and eventually the light of divine grace will irradiate our paths.

1. HEROD PLOTS MURDER. "Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them, and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go and diligently inquire after the child; and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him."

The aged tyrant has but recently murdered two of his sons under suspicion of aspiring to the crown. He again trembles with fear upon hearing of another king of the Jews. Will this child rob him of the throne which he imagines secure by having shed the blood of his own children? Fear has not subsided in his heart before he plans a sacrilegious deed. If not convinced, he is at least in trepidation concerning the divine origin of the child, source of the prophecies and supernatural cause of the appearance of the star. He consults the Scriptures to discover the truth and carefully, "dil-

igently" investigates the time of the first appearance of the star. He is subsequently guided by these data in promulgating the edict of blood. And yet his sole aim is to circumvent the prophecies and to slay the Child whom God has foreordained Messias and King of the Jews.

Such is the inconsistency of human passions, which often make their victim credulous and incredulous at the same time, afraid of God and still defying Him.

Herod's fear and cowardice prevent him from making public preparations; with the cunning of a fox he chooses covert, indirect ways suggested by his deep malice. He asks the priests and scribes about the place where he can find the child; he cross-questions the Magi about the time of the first appearance of the star, to determine the age of the child. On these data he formulates his plan. The number of the murders in which he may be implicated, is negligible.

In order to use the Magi for his purposes, he dons the mask of piety. He also intends, so he says, to go to adore the child, therefore his injunction, that the strangers "diligently inquire after him and bring him word when they have found him."

Finally, to forestall excitement among the populace, to keep the intelligence about the new king as secret as possible, he obliges the Magi to leave Jerusalem that very night. All Bethlehem will be asleep when they arrive there; this will prevent commotion in the little town. But here too, he only furthers the designs of Providence; had the Magi left Jerusalem in the day

time, the star could scarcely have been their guide. Herod, however, is sure of success.

*Applications.* 1) This affords a striking demonstration of the activity and energy of human passions, but also of their criminal lack of fairness and the feverish haste with which they devour their victim. How frequently, in view of their shrewdness, do we find the words of the Savior verified: "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (Luke 16,8). They are not only wiser but more zealous, energetic and willing to undergo hardships. It rarely happens in the service of God and for the noblest motives, that the powers of the mind and heart and corporal strength are so entirely exhausted as in the service of passion and crime. Notwithstanding this, the passions never give in return peace and rest, which accompany fidelity to God; on the contrary, they occasion fear, anxiety, uncounted cares and a disturbed mind, often on the verge of insanity. Is not the cause of God worthy of infinitely more trouble and labor than men expend in the service of vice? Those who understand this truth and act accordingly, are saints. The saints, moreover, do not use and sacrifice their fellowmen for vile, personal interests, but spend and immolate themselves for God and their neighbor. Let us study the character of Herod carefully, to strengthen the determination not to be governed by any passion.

2) This single instance sets forth the appalling one-sidedness of the passions, even in matters of faith, so that their victim deports himself as a believer and at the same time as one who denies divine revelation. People of

this type accept divine doctrines and acknowledge the operation of Providence only in so far as they threaten to rob them of the advantages they crave, or inflict the loss they dread; they admit the existence of an overruling power in so far as it can help them to accomplish their desires or prevent them from reaching their goal; they neglect supernatural truths totally in so far as they have a relation to man's final end and his duties towards God and creatures.

This is not all. They jump at absolutely unwarranted conclusions and fear veritable shadows and non-entities. Upon hearing about the new-born King of the Jews, Herod immediately sees in Him a dangerous rival who will dethrone him. Yet nothing is farther from the mind of that King than to occupy an earthly throne.

How wisely does St. Ignatius exhort us in his rules for the discernment of spirits, not to give way to any importunate impulse, even though it seem reasonable and holy. It is an error and can never lead to a good end; for God, the source of truth and peace, does not dominate man like a merciless martinet; but importunate impulse makes a slave of him. By yielding to such an urge, we allow ourselves to be guided by passion, and the consequence is that the vision of the mind is clouded. Fallen nature and the enemy of mankind make a tool of passion. Therefore, it must be our unfaltering principle not to succumb to impulse nor to any kind of excitement. The mere fact that disquiet, restlessness prevail in our soul must be reason enough to delay action in order to ascertain how we shall feel after we have regained mental poise. This applies even to most sacred affairs. If we are too impatient to await the proper time to do a certain

thing, we must refrain from action. If we succumb to the impulse, we shall certainly get into trouble.

We must apply this principle in the direction of souls. One illustration will suffice. If young persons are obsessed by a restless desire to enter a seminary or convent, it would hardly seem that this is a true vocation, or that at least it is not mature. If they follow this impulse they will soon return to the world.

II. HEROD LEADS TO CHRIST. "Who having heard the king, went their way." God allows men to retain their liberty; He permits them to wear the chains forged by their own passions and those of others. But without willing or knowing it, in the end they must serve the designs of God. Had it not been for Herod, so large a number of chief priests and scribes would scarcely have assembled to make known formally to the Magi, to us and others, through the gospel, what Israel expected from the promises of the Old Testament, and the meaning which they read into these prophecies. Had it not been for Herod's passions, it is certain that the Idumean would not have manifested so much interest in the question about the new-born King of the Jews.

The Magi on the contrary, suffer no harm on account of their momentary deception by the designing hypocrisy of the tyrant. Through him they learn what they wish to know.

Nor is it to the detriment of Christ that Herod plots against Him. The Idumean must make the time and place of His birth known and confirm the fact that the

Child of Bethlehem is the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning Him. If Herod subsequently commands all the male children to be murdered whose age is in accord with the time and place announced by the prophets and the star, he only completes the proof of the Messianic dignity of Jesus. For the Messias born at that time and in that place must remain among the living; His death cannot ensue until He has attained manhood. The prophecies picture Him in His ministry as teacher and wonder-worker, thus foretelling that He will not die in childhood. But of all the children born in that time and in that place, Jesus alone remains. Therefore He is the Messias.

*Applications.* 1) Says an old proverb: "Man proposes, but God disposes." This is true in small affairs as well as in great. Even cruel Herod had to serve God's plan when he believed that he was carrying into effect his own execrable designs, contrary to the plans of God. The same is true in daily life. Let us be firmly convinced of this in practice as well as in theory. God's will must prevail, and however much we may resist, we cannot frustrate His designs; we harm only ourselves. He alone who serves God, can be certain that his labors and sacrifices are not in vain. Not only this: he alone can lead a contented life and be assured of the consolations of God.

2) Nothing can do actual harm to the Magi in the service of God, not even the knavery and criminal violence of Herod, not even their inability to fathom his cunning, not even the faith they place in his hypocrisy and sham

piety. Nay, their simplicity is their best safeguard in Jerusalem. If they manifest the least doubt in his counsel, they will never leave the city alive. In reality, everything Herod does during their sojourn in Palestine conduces to their profit. Thus do the ways of God prevail. For man there remains but one task, to follow faithfully the road of God's choice, even though human ignorance and malice seem to indicate its course. Following this path the Magi attain salvation; the Jews, the chief priests, the scribes and the people, heedless of the direction of God, rush headlong into perdition. They serve Herod, they curry favor with men who lead them astray, and refuse to serve the Lord and supreme Ruler.

The priest and the religious laboring for the welfare of others must by pre-eminence recognize the providence of God and follow its lead in all things. They will otherwise meet with misery and disaster and incur for their charges the same fate. Let us, therefore, always look beyond external appearances of things and events and glean salutary lessons from examples furnished in the inspired writings, the lives of the Saints and from personal experience.

III. REAPPEARANCE OF THE STAR. "And behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was. And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

In Jerusalem the Magi have to submit to a severe trial. Convinced that they are following God's call, they have made a long journey to adore the new born King of the Jews. Arrived in the capital, they meet

with a bitter disappointment. However, they do not relinquish their pious project nor are they deceived and disheartened by the total lack of interest among the Jews. They utilize the information, and despite the late hour of the night, they go to Bethlehem.

Behold, God allows the star to reappear, and resumes their guidance. This is the reward of their fidelity while in Jerusalem.

The heavenly sign shines in splendor over Bethlehem and the place where the Child is to be found. They are reassured that their entire undertaking has been under the auspicious guidance of God. Induced by that star to journey to Jerusalem, they are now directed to Bethlehem, not only by the words of men, but by the words of the inspired Book and the same celestial sign. The star makes them confident also that the information gained in the palace of the foreign monarch is correct.

Afterwards they will sense the meanness, hypocrisy and cruelty of Herod in all its vileness; but this knowledge does not cast a shadow on the heavenly light they have followed.

*Applications.* 1) Thus does God guide His own. His light does not always shine upon us. At times we must struggle along the road heavenwards with only human, commonplace help, because we are enveloped in spiritual darkness. However, God does not permit us to be tried beyond our strength; He allows the temptation, but He is also mindful of a favorable issue, and after it has been

overcome, we again enjoy His light, strength, consolation. If we are willing to listen to Moses and the prophets, i. e. to employ the ordinary, common and general means of salvation at the disposal of all Christians; if as priests or religious we do not consider it beneath our dignity to practice the simple faith, piety and obedience of the faithful, God is willing, if necessary, to raise the dead from the grave. But if we do not believe Moses, we shall not even believe if the dead return to life. (Luke 16,31). Let us, therefore, make use of the light that God gives us, to walk in the light; that light consists of special inspirations which we receive from Him. And if darkness encompass us, if desolation, aridity or other temptations beset us, let us adhere firmly to what we have previously recognized as right, not retrace our steps nor alter our resolutions; thus we shall achieve the God-given goal. Let us not be perplexed even should we come to a Jerusalem wherein Herod rules and terror holds sway. The star of divine guidance will reappear, bringing light and exceedingly great joy.

2.) Is the command to go to Bethlehem in the dead of night in quest of the child, when people are asleep and all doors are closed against them, not surprising? And yet it is the command of God; for if the star shines brightly over Christ's dwelling place in Bethlehem, they readily find Him and measures for the safety of the Child and the Magi can be most easily taken. The Wise Men slip into the quiet town unnoticed; their piety satisfied, they can depart without enduring the morbid curiosity of the crowd. Herod leaves them to themselves that night and when he sends his soldiers, they are gone, whither no one knows.

God does not work more miracles than necessary; the major part of His providential rule consists in directing the natural activity of men. The reason why some find it hard to believe in Providence is because the course of the world seems so very natural. Has not the Savior told us that even a sparrow does not die without the sanction of Providence? Let us entreat a clear understanding of the ways in which God directs the world, and for the ability to perceive His guiding hand in ordinary actions, even in the ignorance and malice of men.

COLLOQUY. Praise of Divine Providence; thanksgiving for divine guidance in our lives; petition for deep perception of its workings and for trustful submission to its sway. "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God. Thy good spirit shall lead me into the right land; for thy name's sake, O Lord, thou wilt quicken me in thy justice. Thou wilt bring my soul out of trouble" (Ps. 142,10.11).

## Meditation 9

### THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI (Matt. 2,11.12)

"And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary, his mother, and falling down they adored him; and opening their treasures they offered him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country."

The Magi came to Bethlehem and found the abode of the Child. Entering they saw the Divine Infant, the King, in whose quest they had come, reposing in His mother's lap. In this detail also, God's guidance was verified. They fell on their knees to offer gifts. But they were not permitted to tarry long. That same night God warned them in a dream not to return to Jerusalem, to Herod. Therefore they took another route and returned to the far East, whence they had come. This was the first solemn homage paid to the Savior.

We are all familiar with the picture of the adoring Magi. Though the circumstances were bereft of the splendor with which artists represent them, the homage of the Gentile world has a deeper significance than the most colorful picture of Oriental grandeur.

Let us implore the grace to render worthy homage to our Savior not in words alone, but in our deeds and lives. May Jesus accept our adoration and oblation. May He grant us the favor of remaining with Him that He may protect and guide us as He shielded the Magi against Herod and led them in safety to their homes.

1. FAITH OF THE MAGI. "And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary, his mother, and falling down they adored him."

The Magi have undertaken this journey to find a king. They looked for Him, naturally, first of all, in the royal capital of Jerusalem. God and men, however, directed them to Bethlehem, where David as a simple shepherd lad had tended his flock. What do they find in the place indicated by the star? A poor dwelling and a child in his mother's lap. But they are fully aware that God has spoken to them, and directing them to this poor, frail child, points Him out to them as the great King of the Jews. They believe in Providence. The supernatural experiences and the grace offered them upon entering the humble abode, enable them to make this sublime act of faith. Despite the poverty and lowliness that surround the Child and the mother, they neither doubt nor falter. They are right. This Child in His mother's lap is indeed the Savior of the world. He is the Son of David, the new-born King, to whom God had given for inheritance the Gentile race, and for His possession the uttermost parts of the earth. Nay

more, this feeble child is the Son of the living God, whom the stars obey. Like His Father He is God, even though He reclines in the lap of a human mother, who is justified to call Him her son. He directs the lives and destinies of men; He leads them to His Father in Heaven. All this and more is He whom the Magi have found.

*Applications.* 1) To us on earth the Savior does not reveal His external greatness, majesty and dignity. Frequently He and His works have the semblance of the impotence and lowliness of Bethlehem. But the splendor and might of divinity are not impaired by concealment. His love shines with added splendor when for our sake in His humility He appears as a little child in the arms of His mother. We know that we are not mistaken when we see in Him the new-born King of the Jews, the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind. He has revealed Himself to us not only by fulfilling the prophecy of Micheas, as in the case of the Wise Men, not only by the single miracle of the star, but in consequence of the fulfillment of many, nay, of all prophecies and by many miracles in the past and present. Above all the stars shines that great miracle, the Church, His work in the firmament of world history. Therefore, let us kneel in adoration professing our faith in Jesus Christ, God and Man, only begotten Son of the Father, Our Blessed Lord. He allows us to find Him. We have the true faith in preference to millions of men. This profession of faith in Christ's divinity often repeated, is all the more necessary today when there is so general a denial of His divinity, even by nominal Christians. It would be a sad task to traverse the vast ex-

panse of our land, to enumerate those outside of the Catholic Church, who still believe in this dogma.

2) But we have not to go very far to find the Divine Child present in person. True it is that He appears among us and abides constantly in our midst under a more insignificant form than that of a child a little more than a year old, as the Wise Men saw Him; for He manifests Himself to us under the humble species of a morsel of bread. The faith required here is in a way greater than that expected of the Magi; but the motives of this faith are proportionally stronger and more numerous. Although their faith and ours is based on the unerring word of God, the fact that God has actually revealed the mystery of the Eucharistic presence to us, connotes more incontrovertible proofs. It is our duty, therefore, to evince our practical faith by great reverence before the Blessed Sacrament. Our external demeanor and our interior sentiments should measure up to our convictions.

If our faith in Jesus in the Eucharist is practical and deeply rooted in our hearts, it will urge us to visit our Savior in the tabernacle frequently. Our place before the altar will become the dearest spot on earth for us, a real home to which we often revert.

II. OFFERINGS OF THE MAGI. "And opening their treasures they offered him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh."

Gifts play an important rôle in Oriental life, and in the mind of these simple people form an essential part of homage. They are intended as a striking acknowledgment of superiority. Therefore, the Magi open their

treasures and offer the King of the Jews gold, frankincense and myrrh. In bygone days Solomon had despatched his fleets to import these treasures into his kingdom. The new Prince of Peace does not send His emissaries to buy precious wares for Him from foreign potentates. The princes come of their own volition to offer them gratuitously. Israel has no gifts for its King; but a foreign land gives its best, its priceless possessions as tribute, we might say, as a birthday present. The value and grandeur of these gifts is in marked contrast to the poverty and lowliness surrounding the divine Child in consequence of His own choice and the adamantine hearts of His people. Verily, the Son of God has no need of temporal wealth and pomp; He did not descend from Heaven to seek the paltry goods of this world. But if a voluntary offering is to be made to Him, the greatest and most precious that the earth offers and man can contrive, is alone proper. Material gifts, of course, have no intrinsic worth in the eyes of God; it is the symbolism of these gifts that counts, the devotedness, loyalty, obedience of the human heart to the Divine Master. In return He gives His earthly children a gift surpassing all that they can offer, even their most profound affection and service. He gives Himself to them as Savior, and this includes everything that Heaven can bestow.

*Applications.* 1) Our Savior solicits gifts from us. He is not satisfied with mute homage or exaggerated pomp; mere externalism and lip service will not suffice; He de-

mands deeds and sacrifices. Do we presume to offer Him anything but the best we have, the utmost love and fealty of our hearts? But this gift honors the giver more than the recipient. To lay at His feet rich Oriental treasures is not in our power, but we can offer the best we have. Poor and valueless though this may be, He will accept it graciously. His return gift is assuredly not less than the reward of the Magi in finding the Divine Child; for our recompense is God Himself, Savior and Blessed Lord. Holy Church expresses this truth in a hymn to the Blessed Sacrament: "At birth He gave Himself as companion, in death He gave Himself as ransom, reigning He gives Himself as reward."

While it is proper to make this general oblation of our hearts and lives to God, there will be times when a generous specific oblation is necessary. It may concern the place or the employment which canonical or religious obedience has assigned us; it may be a disappointment, a humiliation, a bereavement or any other kind of sacrifice. Let us not refuse our dear Lord the gift He desires, but make our special oblation generously, with deep love and undaunted trust. God's help will not fail.

2) How disgraceful is the conduct of Israel in contrast to the generous co-operation of the Gentiles. Israel has no gift for its King, nor does it even condescend to offer the homage of words. Is not the example of the Jews repeated in our own day? Converts to the faith are often very generous in paying homage to our Lord and in making sacrifices for Him; while Catholics, whose birth-right is the true faith and who have grown up in the luxury of supernatural gifts and favors, refuse to forego a slight

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comfort or a trivial worldly advantage for the sake of Christ. The laity assume grave responsibilities and hardships, renounce what is dearest to them for the love of Christ, while those consecrated to His service, called by divine grace to a life of self-abnegation and humility, refuse to give Him what their vocation, the welfare of souls and His honor demand. Does it not seem as though we had been spoiled by the liberality of our Savior? Why are we so blind to the requirements of our state, the obligations imposed by our close relationship to the Child of Bethlehem? Dare we expect and even demand the comforts of earth superadded to the graces and supernatural privileges of our vocation? Let us not suffer others to go to Bethlehem to offer to the Infant Savior their most prized possessions, while we linger in indolence and irresolution amid the comforts of the metropolis. May the Wise Men share with us their heroic generosity, while we entreat the blessed Child of Bethlehem concealed in the tabernacle: "Heart of Jesus, burning with love for me, inflame my heart with love for Thee." May the example of Israel, faithless to its exalted vocation, be a warning to us.

III. RETURN OF THE MAGI. "And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country."

The Magi must forego the happiness of being present in person for any length of time, to behold the Child in His lowliness and winsomeness. That day has not yet come for the Gentiles. The Messias must first be rejected by His people and He must shed His blood on the cross for all mankind. Then only is the vineyard

to be taken away from the unfaithful husbandmen and the place of the Jews given to another people who shall render to the lord of the vineyard fruit in due season. But the loyal Magi will never forfeit the gifts which the Savior has bestowed upon their souls.

After a time of supreme delight in the presence of the God-Man, an anticlimax supervenes. It bears too, the impress of the loving solicitude of God. He who led them to the manger by a star, now by "an answer in sleep," a supernatural dream, recalls them to their homes to resume the struggle against the long odds of daily friction and commonplace endeavor. They are to prepare in their earthly homes for heavenly dwellings by the use of the gifts and graces conferred upon them by the Savior at Bethlehem. Even here below they are not deserted by Him. Providence watches over them and their lot is intimately associated with that of the new-born King of the Jews. For this reason they are not permitted to return to Herod, who is inimical to them as well as to the Child. As they followed the message and guidance of the star when it called them to Christ, they obey also when God separates them from Him for the remainder of their lives.

*Applications.* 1) Our sojourn upon earth is not a time of enjoyment but of struggle and renouncement. At times God allows us a taste of the sweetness of His presence to give us strength and enthusiasm in His service. But soon prosaic everyday life recurs with failure, labors and combat. Then must we show our true calibre, and prove that

we were in earnest when we rendered homage, offered gifts and made a surrender of ourselves to Christ. All who wish to belong to Him must share His fate, His cross, resist baffling influences, endure enmity and persecution from the world and the powers of darkness. But too frequently, the glorious journey to Christ, when heaven and earth seem to furnish unfailing road-maps, gives place to forced and secret flight from His enemies. Even then we are not left to our own resources, if we remain loyal to Christ. He will be our guide to a secure and safe path in the midst of difficulties and perplexities. It is our task to follow Him carefully especially when our hearts are not charmed by His visible signs and sensible consolations. He is a faithful servant who does his duty not only when his master is present to supervise, but also when the master is absent; a faithful servant performs without reserve all the tasks imposed by lawful authority and not only those which attract him and afford pleasure. Let us, therefore, be faithful in the performance of all our duties and keep our resolutions at all times.

2) The Magi see Christ only once and for a brief period. We priests and religious can be with Him every day and as often within the day as we choose. Either our residence is very near to a church or we have the honor of sheltering Our Divine Lord under our own roof. This is indeed, an enviable privilege. Let us make use of it by frequently visiting the Blessed Sacrament. As priests we are divinely-appointed custodians of the Holy Eucharist, as religious we are members of His household. We must not relegate attendance upon the Divine Majesty in the course of the day exclusively to devout laymen, but we

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must often repair to His benign presence. His house is a house of prayer, but pre-eminently a house for our prayers. Repeated visits to the Blessed Sacrament will foster in us union and familiarity with Jesus, so precious in spiritual life and so inspiring in our work.

COLLOQUY. Generous and heartfelt oblation of ourselves to Christ and petition for loyal and entire surrender to Our Savior is our vocation. "Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given me all; to Thee I restore it. Dispose of it according to Thy will. Give me Thy grace and Thy love; they suffice."

## Meditation 10

### THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (Matt. 2,13–15)

"And after they were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and His mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him. Who arose and took the child and his mother, by night, and retired into Egypt; and he was there until the death of Herod. That it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying: Out of Egypt have I called my son."

The homage of the Magi is directly followed by the reverse. Strangers come from afar to honor and welcome the King of the Jews, but He must flee from the midst of His people as soon as "all Jerusalem" becomes aware of His presence in their vicinity. In His own country, dangers lurk for Him and only a foreign land, Egypt, the home of debased paganism, offers Him a place of safety.

While the Jews through Herod, their acknowledged king, plot death and ruin for Him and His mission, God watches over Him, His mother and faithful foster-father. The command of the angel involves a hardship for the Holy Family, but God transforms this

trial into blessing; it must assist in the fulfillment of the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, conduce to the disclosure of the identity of the Child and His parents and tend to their exaltation.

The Savior fleeing from His own people furnishes a brief but telling summary of His entire mortal life. "He came unto his own and his own received him not" (John 1,11), neither corporally nor spiritually. He therefore turns to the Gentiles to bring them salvation.

Let us pray for the grace to discern more clearly with the eyes of faith, to recognize everywhere, Christ our God and Savior, despite the lowliness of His appearance; we must be heedful not to allow our vision to become blurred by temporal interests. In perilous situations, let us not lose sight of God, so that we may cheerfully obey His commands, knowing that, though difficult to carry out, they are always given for our good by the kindest of fathers.

1. GOD'S VIGILANCE. "And behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph saying: . . . It will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him."

The entire life of Our Lord is one great revelation of the workings of Divine Providence. The intervention of supernatural powers in the affairs and operations of earth in ordinary life and the activities of men as a rule remains hidden; but in the life of the God-

Man it frequently assumes a visible form. This is the case especially in His childhood, while His lips are silent and His hands still inactive. God's government of the world, however, is not less real because unseen. Apparently He leaves men to their own devices, not seeming to observe them nor their designs. Nevertheless, nothing escapes His all-seeing eyes and the reins are safe in His omnipotent hands.

The Magi have come as a warning for Herod and the people; but the king makes the chief priests and scribes subservient to the measures by which he intends to evade imaginary danger to his throne. He plots no less than the murder of the Child; he lies in ambush in close proximity of his victim. The Child knows all this, while those in charge of Him slumber in unsuspecting peace. But God sends His angel to save the Redeemer from the machinations of the king and His own people.

*Applications.* 1) Like the Savior, His apostles and disciples and all those in His service must be prepared for persecution, even by their own people. The world hates them because they are not of the world. It hates the Church to this very day; it hates all who are faithful to Christ and His spouse. Shall we try to elude its hate, and seek safety by deserting Christ and becoming children of the world? Shall we expend thought and energy upon preventing and warding off insidious dangers to our temporal interests? No; reasonable prudence and caution are proper, but neither anxiety nor fear. What is hidden from our eyes does not escape the Almighty. He protects His own,

and is aware of all perils. Whatever He permits despite this vigilance, we can easily bear with His assistance; when He allows us to suffer external tribulations, He has our benefit in view. We must never forget that "when the need is greatest, God is nearest."

Confidence in God also demands that we do not sacrifice our Catholic institutions to that atrocious idol of modern times, the all-powerful, all-wise paternal state, on the plea of better financial help or greater security. The efficiency of the Catholic pulpit is not cared for by the State; why then that of its greatest aid, our schools and charitable institutions?

2) In our career as priests it may happen that our duty, above all that connected with the sacred tribunal will expose our good name, nay our very existence to dangers from which God alone can save us. Let us not give way to depressing anxieties and fears; God will protect us. A similar trial may befall any one in charge of souls. We may have to subject ourselves to suspicion, we may have to run the risk of physical contagion, brutal attack. We must not rashly court danger; we must exercise prudent caution; when all this has been done, trusting in God, we must assume the risk. He will help us. The world is not governed by physical laws merely; the Almighty is independent of them. Let us trust in Him.

II. GOD'S COMMAND. "Arise and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee."

Through an angel God warns Joseph in his sleep; not satisfied with a mere warning, He gives minute di-

rections so that Joseph does not have to spend much time in planning measures to escape the danger. Those he must protect are "the Child and His mother." Therefore God takes the rescue in His own hands and specifies the successive steps; Joseph has only to put them into execution. God commands an immediate flight "by night," i. e. that very night, flight into a foreign country, flight without any preparation with Mary and the Child, flight into exile for an indefinite period of time, "until I shall tell thee."

God has entrusted His Son to human beings and they must care for Him with human means. Such is the order of God during this period of Christ's life. Miracles belong to His Messianic career, to the foundation and propagation of the Kingdom of God. But like all human beings, not even Christ excepted, they must make use of natural means. If they entail hardships, privations, humiliations and sacrifices, this is but natural to the condition of sinful man, and even the Son of God wishes to share them. They will save souls from an immeasurably harder lot in eternity, because the sufferings of this life recall the prodigal to the arms of his loving father; we are the more willing to endure these sufferings, because Christ Himself did not disdain them.

*Applications.* 1) Christ has made us children of God anew, being the first-born of many brethren (Rom. 8,29). We may, therefore, not expect from our tender Father in Heaven treatment different from what He accorded His

only begotten Son. Although He does not send us an angel to give directions, He speaks clearly through the circumstances of our lives, His commandments, the duties of our state and the guidance of lawful superiors. Many a divine dispensation works a hardship for the natural man, not a few are humiliating. In the performance of the tasks and duties of our state and office He assists us with interior grace; sometimes He manifests the activity of His providence by external signs. But as a rule, He tells us: "Arise, flee, remain." "Arise" from care-free repose; "flee" this particular danger for your soul; "remain" and persevere in this difficult position or situation and help yourself out of trouble. But even so He does not desert us, just as He did not forsake the Child of Bethlehem in His perilous flight.

Nevertheless, although we trust to God's solicitude in all the affairs of life, we must not allow this confidence to degenerate into indolent, inactive repose in the sweet assurance that we have a Heavenly Father in Him who governs the world and all that is in it. Saint Ignatius says: "Trust in God as if you had to do everything and act as though everything depended upon God alone." This saying of a man who had such faith in Divine Providence may seem strange on the face of it. "Trust God as though you had to do everything," i. e., employ circumspection and plan carefully as though God left everything to you. "Act as though all depended on God alone," i. e., when you execute your plans, proceed with peace of mind and resignation to His will which arise from the firm conviction that as all success depends upon God, He will direct everything to a favorable end. Ordinarily men leave too much of the planning to God and too little of the issue to Divine Providence.

2) We have here another lesson to learn. What task was nobler, more conducive to the glory of God, what intention was holier and more consonant with the divine will than the duties of Joseph's position, than the rescue of the Divine Child from brutal Herod? And yet what sacrifices fell to the lot of Joseph, what trouble did he have to undergo not only on this occasion but ever since he espoused Mary. We sometimes think and feel when charged with a holy and important work or position, that our course should run smoothly and that no one, least of all our friends, associates and those for whom we labor, should create any difficulties or thwart our efforts. And of God we subconsciously expect that His omnipotence will remove every obstacle and miraculously touch the hearts of men. But these are the thoughts of poor human nature and the expectations of those unacquainted with the ways of God. We must not forget that it is a privilege to work for God and immortal souls, that the more we have to inject into this undertaking of our capital, of our own efforts, troubles, patience, humility, resignation, the greater will be our share in the returns.

III. GOD'S HELP. "Who arose, and took the child and his mother by night and retired into Egypt; and he was there until the death of Herod. That it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet saying: Out of Egypt have I called my son."

Joseph proves worthy of the position God has entrusted to him. His invincible faith, his heroic spirit of sacrifice stand the test. He immediately carries out the order of the angel and retires into Egypt. The holy

family remains here until after Herod's death. Even when God works through men, He does not withdraw His guiding hand. If He finds faithful obedience and sincere co-operation on the part of men, He does not refuse His help. This is the reason why Joseph can accomplish the flight unobserved, despite the desperate situation. Desperate it certainly is; for Herod is only a few miles away; his soldiers can cover the entire territory more speedily than Joseph with Mary and the Child.

God's care is also evident in not allowing His own to perish in the desolation of their exile, even though the care of the Holy Family is a heavy burden. Finally, the end of the trouble arrives—Herod dies. This is one aspect of the divine care of the Holy Family in their plight; there is still another, which sets forth the divine intervention more strikingly.

The tribulation has to result in exaltation, in the fulfilment of the prophecy and thus in a new proof of Christ's dignity. According to the ideas then prevalent among the Jews and the express teaching of Saint Paul, (Col. 2,17, Heb. 10,1), the entire Old Testament is a "shadow" of the New Testament, and the Israelitic nation a type of the Messias. The prophet Osee in the words quoted by the evangelist refers to the time when Jahweh loved youthful Israel; but when the nation reached manhood's estate, it turned away from Him, and evoked divine chastisement. If this penalty has been paid, God will save the people. Its salvation is at hand:

and as the chosen people were "born of Egyptian slavery," so the new salvation through the Savior is to enter from Egyptian exile into the land of promise. Joseph is obliged to make the sacrifice, to co-operate in the designs of divine wisdom and love.

*Applications.* 1) Although humanly speaking the task of saving the Child seemed well nigh impossible, Joseph succeeded because it was God's command. This impresses us with the value and power of obedience in any work assigned by God's representatives. It happens frequently that a young priest is required by his superiors to undertake a work which seems beyond his ability. But unless after consultation with more experienced members of the clergy, he finds that he has weighty reasons to make respectful representations to his bishop or other authorities, he should disregard his misgivings and antipathy and intrepidly assume the task. It is imposed upon him by God, who will lend help and make it conduce to the salvation of souls.

How often is a religious required by superiors to fill a position or undertake a work or project for which he thinks himself not properly fitted. He fears that his charges will suffer from his want of time, preparation, strength or intellectual attainments. Let him question himself whether the helpless carpenter of Nazareth was equipped to cope with mighty and crafty Herod. Were not all odds against him? If we imitate Joseph's example, we shall succeed. If external success should be lacking, responsibility for this rests with those that gave the order; as far as the subject is concerned, God will accomplish favorable results in some other way.

2) Every human being is an instrument to carry out the designs of God. Sometimes at least, the welfare of others and the interests of Christ are entrusted to him. But whether good or evil will result, depends on his willingness to be used as an agent of God's purposes. This is true above all of priests and religious. Their mission is to defend Christ and His cause. Divine interests and the welfare of souls are entrusted to them. They must save when a Herod threatens not only physical but moral ruin of men. This is often as difficult as a sudden, precipitate flight into a strange country at dead of night. It depends upon the fidelity and intrepid sacrifice of priests and religious whether Herod will destroy the work of Christ in human souls. If the minister of the Gospel or the religious does not possess Joseph's fidelity and spirit of sacrifice, if he cannot endure cares that gnaw at the heart, and take upon himself onerous troubles for the benefit of souls, he is not worthy of the priesthood and the religious state. But if he neither fears nor spares labor and sacrifices, God will work with him and through him for the salvation of the faithful, the promotion of the cause of Christ, the propagation of the Church and for his own eternal welfare. Such was the reward of the sacrifices of Joseph.

COLLOQUY. Renew the generous oblation of your entire being to the service of God and the salvation of souls. Pray for confidence and fidelity in all conditions of life. "The Lord ruleth me, and I shall want nothing. . . . For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they have comforted

me. Thou hast prepared a table before me against them that afflict me . . . And thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And that I may dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days." (Ps. 22,1.4.6.)

## Meditation 11

### THE MURDER OF THE INFANTS OF BETHLEHEM

(Matt. 2,16–18)

"Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and sending killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying: A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning: Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."

The Magi had scarcely started their homeward journey, and Joseph his flight, when Herod learned of the departure of the Wise Men. He realized that he had been caught in his own trap. Therefore he struck the blow for which he had been preparing to destroy the pretender. He did not succeed in slaying the Divine Child, but all the male children in and around Bethlehem of two years and younger, were doomed to die. His inhuman cruelty made them the first martyrs of Christianity. This should have recalled to the people of Israel the prophecy Jeremias announced when the children of Juda or the descendants of Lia were

led into the Babylonian captivity, as the children of Joseph, the descendants of Rachel, had been carried off into the Assyrian exile.

"On earth peace to men," the angels sang at the birth of Christ; but now the wailing of babes mingling with the groans of the mothers made a discord of desolation in Bethlehem and its surroundings. The slaughter was ordered not by foreign chieftains, but by their own king, to prevent the entrance of the Prince of Peace into Israel.

When man allows himself to be ruled by passion, how often does he subvert the merciful intentions of God and work his own ruin, without being able to prevent the execution of the divine plan; instead of gain, personal injury is the result.

Let us entreat the grace never to experience the evil results of being influenced by our passions and by temporal concerns so that we may not forfeit God's grace and lose the spirit of self-sacrifice.

1. KING HEROD. History calls him "Herod the Great." Truly, external success, earthly splendor, even naturally good qualities were not lacking. By prudence and energy he rose from private life to royal dignity. In all the vicissitudes of those troublous times of the civil wars in the Roman Empire, in all the revolutions that shook the entire known world, under all the hostile potentates that wrenched from one another the control of that vast dominion, for forty years almost he

contrived to keep his throne until death, and to make his sons heirs of his kingdom. He also achieved great things in his own country. He increased his territory, gave it peace and security from internal foes and external invaders, wonderfully promoted its prosperity and culture. He reared magnificent buildings, temples and theaters not only in his own kingdom, but throughout Syria, and even farther away in all the principal cities of the then known world. He even changed and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem with a splendor never seen before. Herod was a gifted and strong man, truly great in the eyes of the world.

Yet all this, in spite of his achievements, did not render him good or even happy. His sly cunning, his unscrupulous selfishness and his total disregard for other human beings became his worst tormentors, caused him to distrust and hate the members of his own family and to make his own flesh and blood very miserable. Even in the eyes of the world the "great" Herod was a criminal and a monster, abominated by his subjects, surrounded by intrigues in his own house, a very scourge for all, for his wives and children as well as his people.

*Applications.* 1) Herod presents a very clear type of the man who serves not God, but himself. As this fault is so very pronounced in him and as the publicity of his position and of all his actions renders him conspicuous, everybody can see what godless impiety makes of man. It cannot

be noticed so well in persons who are not so heedless of others as he, and who live in smaller and more obscure circumstances. Nevertheless, also in them impiety and selfishness are of the same character. The best natural gifts and the greatest successes become a ruin for the men themselves and for all who have to live and deal with them.

Everybody trembles with fear of the despotic whims of such tyrants; nobody is safe from their intrigues and arbitrary acts of violence. For the actors themselves, they are but a source of perpetual unrest and of a maddening confusion of mind, so that they cannot enjoy even the results of their crimes. The whole world is their enemy and they have to fear every moment that somebody will pay them back in their own coin.

But what is worse, they not only cause their own temporal ruin together with that of others, but being God's enemies, they force others to become God's enemies too, and thus prevent or spoil the works of divine mercy, as Herod does here in driving the Savior away from Israel.

What a warning is Herod for us against permitting any human passion, above all that of egotism which puts self in God's place, to grow up in our hearts.

The seed of such a passion lies dormant in every human heart, even in ours. Ask yourself what is the cause of most of your sins and faults, which aspiration or tendency, which like or dislike, when affected, creates a great disturbance in your mind, what is the cause of most of your natural fears and apprehensions, and you will know which is your most dangerous passion. That passion must be combated by means of the particular examen. Do not give in to it; do not let it grow and strengthen.

2) How was it possible that God permitted such a monster as Herod to occupy the throne of David and rule His chosen people? The house of David and the nation of Israel had lost their vocation. The people did not want God to be their king, they wanted to be fashionable. The successors of David hobnobbed with the degenerate pagan monarchs and desired to be "men of the world." Hardly one of them had the courage to do his duty, to abolish the pagan shrines and forbid the pagan superstitions to which their subjects were addicted. Instead of being representatives of the Lord of heaven and earth, they preferred to be rulers and even tyrants like the other kings. This caused their downfall. Let us never lose the conviction that if we abandon our vocation we are liable to become veritable monsters. Therefore, let us often renew the resolution rather to die than become untrue to our calling. No sacrifice is too great when our vocation is at stake.

II. THE HOLY INNOCENTS. The Savior comes into this world in which sin exercises its uncanny power through great and little Herods. Israel is groaning under this scourge, and yet it does not find its way to God, to its King and Messias. Only fearing and worrying about the temporal sufferings which that cruel Idumean may inflict, all Jerusalem on the arrival of the Magi "is troubled." In order not to provoke the tyrant's rage the people move neither hand nor foot for the Messias who has appeared in Bethlehem. But the fear of him who can kill only the body and on account of whom they neglect Him who can save as well as ruin body and soul, does not even protest the corporal

life of the children. The babies have to lose their young lives. The entire district in and about Bethlehem is filled with mourning and wailing when the greatest son of David, the source and end of Israel's grandeur, has to flee into exile, defenceless against a tyrant's rage, because Israel is interested only in temporal affairs and fears a mere human being. Still how much happier are those infants who have sacrificed their lives in order to save that of the Redeemer. They are the first martyrs, now glorious in Heaven. What would have been their fate had they grown up and lived to suffer all that the army of Titus wreaked on the Jews? And what would have been their fate in eternity?

*Applications.* 1) Man is placed between God and the world and has to choose either as his master. God suffers Himself to be rejected without much external resistance on His part, although He speaks to conscience and at times asserts His supreme right by outward measures.

How differently does the world act. It obtrudes itself and offers violent resistance when forced to yield to God. Therefore, God's service certainly does not demand less energy than that of the world. The chief and most important part of creation which must be sacrificed for God in His service, is man himself, our own will and desire, our selfishness. All the rest are only partial interests of our self, be they advantages we wish to gain or evils we wish to escape.

How does it happen that after having made numerous sacrifices for God, some people fall low and abandon His service? Often the reason is that they have sacrificed only

external goods, but not themselves. They do not, and in their blindness can not, rise to the holocaust and surrender their whole person with their will and desires. Frequently they sacrifice the external good only to save and retain self and self-will. It is, therefore, important that in exterior sacrifices we keep the end in view and make them for the purpose of annihilating our self-will, and that we do not forego the external good by giving Almighty God, as it were, an ultimatum, thinking and hoping that this will be the last act of renunciation and that God will not demand anything more or anything greater.

2) God's service demands real sacrifices. But what would be gained if a sacrifice is refused Him for the sake of the world and of personal interests? Frequently not even the very object for the sake of which man withdraws in the concrete case from God and His service. Then he loses both God and the temporal good. His is a double loss.

And what is forfeited if for God's sake something temporal, even life, is renounced or jeopardized? Frequently not even that temporal good. But what is gained? Everything for eternal life. We ought to thank God for every sacrifice He is pleased to accept at our hands, and our gratitude ought to be in proportion to the sacrifice. A merchant is happy when he sells his most precious wares; for he knows that the price he receives and the gain he makes are all the greater.

But is not all this hard doctrine? It certainly is unless we free our mind and heart from false notions and fears. The peace of a heart wholly given to God, the realization that there is no obstacle between us and the good God, this elevation of mind of which the Imitation of Christ speaks,

gives the soul great freedom and ease. It is as though we have escaped the smoke and dust of a factory and enjoy the balmy air and sunshine found on the mountain tops.

III. THE PROPHECY. "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias, the prophet, saying: A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning; it was Rachel who bewailed her children and she would not be comforted because they are not anymore."

The evangelist, by the account of the murder of Bethlehem's children, is reminded of the days of the prophet Jeremias. What the latter foresaw is fulfilled now. Those were the days when the people of the kingdom of Israel were led into captivity. God's punishment lay heavily on them on account of their sins; but they were not rejected. God promised to change their misery into salvation. Not only the people of the kingdom of Juda, but even the people of the kingdom of Israel, whom the prophet addressed, would be offered redemption by Christ. Jeremias calls them children of Rachel; for their kings, Jeroboam and his successors, belonged to the tribe of Ephraim, the son of Joseph and the grandson of Rachel. St. Matthew quotes only the beginning of the prophecy which Jeremias continues thus: "Thus saith the Lord: Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thy eyes from tears: for there is a reward for thy work, saith the Lord: and they shall return out of the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy last end, saith the Lord: And the children shall return to their own borders" (Jer.

31,15–17). Then he proceeds to describe how the affliction is for their own good and how it will turn into a blessing when they have done penance, and how the Savior will come in a wonderful manner. Jahweh on the day of liberation will make a new covenant with Juda and Israel. He will be their God, and they His people.

The evangelist is writing for the Jews, who are well acquainted with the prophecies of Jeremias; hence he may refer to the prophecy by merely giving some of the lines which pertain to Israel's exile.

What happened in the days of Jeremias is true now in the days of Herod. Bethlehem mourns and laments over the little ones murdered on account of the sins of the people. But this punishment is not to be a final reprobation. It is a warning that should lead them back to God and save them. Its intent is to bring the guilty ones to their senses. Their lamentations are to be a mourning unto salvation, in order that at least now, when the Messianic redemption is at hand, Israel may not forfeit the last and decisive grace, because the people let themselves be influenced by mere human considerations and anxieties.

*Applications.* 1) The case of Israel during these days of Herodian cruelty is on a smaller scale, often repeated in our own lives. We do not always succeed when, perhaps at the cost of higher interests, we try to escape temporal inconveniences. God permits or even directs that we experience want of esteem and of more serious goods

from those for whom we show a consideration that is not proper. Let us at least after such a painful occurrence open our eyes and in the greater or smaller mishap that follows our weakly giving in to others against prudence and against the dictates of conscience, see a warning of God not to risk His most precious graces for the sake of uncertain temporal gains, perhaps the mere escape of a person's displeasure.

2) We see here again how God's providence makes use even of the sins and vices of men for the eternal welfare of souls. The Bethlehemites could not but be forcibly reminded of the Savior, and not only they, but all Jerusalem, above all the chief priests and scribes, who by their reference to the Messianic prophecy had drawn the cruelty of the tyrant on their fellow-religionists. Possibly their only conclusion was an increased hatred of the despot. That was not God's intention. He wanted to lead them to Christ. When we have to suffer under the sins of others, let us not imitate the Jewish authorities and the poor people who suffered under the king's murderous measure, and indulge in aversion against the malefactor who oppresses us. Let us raise our eyes to God and find in the trial a new motive for serving Him, and possibly a way of doing His holy will.

COLLOQUY. A prayer for fidelity in God's service during periods of earthly trials and dangers. "To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. In thee, O my God, I put my trust; let me not be ashamed. Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths. Direct me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art God my Savior;

and on thee have I waited all day long. Remember, O Lord, thy bowels of compassion (thy merciful heart); and thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world" (Ps. 24,1.2.4–6).

## Meditation 12

### THE RETURN FROM EGYPT (Matt. 2,19–23)

"But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead that sought the life of the child. Who arose, and took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: And being warned in sleep retired into the quarters of Galilee. And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth: That it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: That He shall be called a Nazarene."

Herod died shortly after the flight of the Holy Family and in time Joseph received orders to return with the child and His mother into the country of Israel. This was the proper place of the Messias who had been promised to Israel. But Joseph did not dare to remain in Jerusalem, the capital, nor in Bethlehem, the city of David, on account of Archelaus, who had succeeded his father in the tetrarchy of Judea. Therefore, he repaired to the more remote Galilee. Here Jesus grew up in Nazareth.

All this did not happen by chance; for Nazareth

later on was to give Christ a name which marked the fulfilment of the prophecies according to which the Messias was to be a "Nezer," a shoot of the root of Jesse.

The glorious tribe of Jesse, which had given Israel its kings for centuries, had been laid low like a felled tree, and centuries too had passed since David's throne had been overturned and the glory of his house been extinguished. Then a new shoot sprouted from the old rootstock, hidden and unpretentious, but in it all the glory promised to David was to reach consummation.

Let us pray that we understand God's ways. They are different from those which human wisdom would expect. God likes as it were, to rebuild out of the ruins to which man's folly and malice have reduced His works. He has chosen the weak to confound the strong. Though men mock at them, His plans and His plans alone are in the end carried out.

1. THE MESSIAS IN ISRAEL. "But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt saying: Arise, take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the child."

God is faithful and long-suffering. He has promised the Messias to the Jews. Therefore, Christ has to appear among them, though they have shown themselves little worthy of the promises both during the time of preparation in the Old Covenant and now at Christ's

entrance into the world. God has had to chastise them often enough in the past, in order that they might not entirely walk in the ways of the pagans. And now too, their reception of the first tidings of the new-born King has compared very unfavorably with that of the Gentiles, so unfavorably indeed, that the Savior had to seek refuge in a pagan country.

The murder of the infants of Bethlehem had been a warning for them, just as the chastisements which the Lord inflicted on their forefathers in former centuries. But as God kept His promises then, so He does now. Therefore, when Herod dies, He gives back the Messias to His people. He again sends an angel and orders Joseph to return into the land of Israel.

*Applications.* 1) God is still "the Father of mercies." His gifts are always "without repentance." After every act of faithlessness He is always ready to forgive and be reconciled. Even when He chastises, He wants to save and by means of the chastisement to keep us from ruin. Who among us has sinned as grievously as Israel in its long history and at the time of Christ's appearance? Yet even now "He spreads out his hands to a people that believeth not and contradicteth him" (Rom. 10,21). He has chosen this people and made a covenant with it, and no unfaithfulness on its part can make Him waver in His fidelity to the pact.

He has chosen us too as priests or religious and He remains faithful to the pact He made with us when He gave us this vocation and we accepted it. Our duty is by fidelity to correspond to His fidelity and thus work for our own

salvation and that of the souls entrusted to our care. On our side that covenant consists for priests in the vow of chastity and the promise of canonical obedience to the laws of the Church and the commands of the ordinary; for religious it consists in their vows. Let us consider these obligations as sacred and comply with them as perfectly as we shall wish to have done when we are called to give an account of them to Him with whom we have made the solemn contract.

2) Joseph is always told by Almighty God only so much as he has to know in order to take the steps required at that moment. When the doubt concerning the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin is explained to him, he receives only the direction to take her into his house and to call the child "Jesus." The command to repair to Bethlehem is given only when it is time to go thither and for this a decree of the civil authority is sufficient. When flight is necessary, he receives the word concerning it only at the very moment at which he has to depart and the indefinite direction to stay there until he is bidden to return. That order comes exactly at the time when it is to be carried out, but contains no restrictions as to the place in which he is to settle with his family. Our Lord later on will deal with His disciples in the same way. All this illustrates an important truth for our spiritual life. We must depend on God every moment and perform the duty of the present hour. God very rarely lets us know the more remote future or the ultimate object He intends to attain in and through us. We must follow the maxim of St. John Berchmans; "I shall live only for the present day and not trouble myself about the morrow." The Imitation of Christ is very explicit on this point. It

will be very profitable in this connection to read Book III, Chapter 39.

II. NOT IN JUDEA. "But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither; and being warned in sleep retired into the quarters of Galilee."

How little does Israel correspond to the devotedness of its God. Its Messias, now that the danger for His life has passed, returns from exile. But He cannot live there where the first and most prominent place is His due, but is filled by another. David, His ancestor, took Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it the capital of his kingdom and the centre of Israel's entire religious life. Jerusalem is, so to speak, the heart of the nation from which the life-stream of grace is to course through the entire body. But here a foreigner, an Idumean, reigns, Archelaus, the worthy son of Herod, who has inherited all the malice of his father without the latter's ability, and who is such a tyrant that the Jews themselves will petition Tiberius to depose him and to make Judea an integral part of a Roman province.

Even Bethlehem, the home of Christ's family, because of Archelaus is unsafe.

God wanted the Messias to live in the country of Israel, but neither Jerusalem, the capital city, nor Judea, the principal province, is worthy of this distinction and happiness. Christ is to dwell among His people in great concealment and unknown to them for the far greater

part of His life. This arrangement is due not only to the well-grounded fears of St. Joseph, but to a command given to St. Joseph in a dream.

*Applications.* 1) Man by his want of receptiveness as well as by his positive resistance can forfeit the divine grace in spite of God's mercy. For it is true that by his own fault he can place himself in a condition which prevents the bestowal of certain graces. It is equally true that later he cannot all at once change this condition. This applies to exterior circumstances and to the interior dispositions. Next to final reprobation, the greatest punishment of sin and of the contempt of grace consists in this that they prevent further graces and lead so often to new sins. The sad consequences can be removed only by more strenuous efforts on the part of the sinner and by a more than ordinary fidelity in the use of the graces which still remain. The Jews did not make these efforts, but rejected the further graces given them, and therefore were ruined. Their fate must be a warning to us and a strong impulse to correspond faithfully with God's graces.

And if through lack of fervor, lightmindedness, carelessness and insensibility we have fallen into a serious fault or contracted a bad habit, let us not think that one confession, one good resolution, one effort repairs and settles all, and that ordinary efforts will suffice. Such a case requires extraordinary efforts, repeated perhaps frequently, more circumspection than would usually be enough, humble patience with oneself, but patience that does not degenerate into weakness. Relapses will occur, but then we must always rise again and try again. Despair and despondency would be fatal.

2) To how many humiliations did Israel subject the Savior during the first few years of His life. His birth in a stable, their total neglect of Him, that hurried flight, the life among the Egyptians who utterly despised the Jews, the retirement into Galilee, despised by the orthodox portion of the nation, and to Nazareth, the town of ill repute, "out of which a prophet never has come." And He, the Son of God, the desired of the nations, the great Messias! Truly He has humbled Himself. And what is the cause of these humiliations? The cause is that Christ is not welcome in Israel, for Israel is wholly engrossed in its temporal interests. So far the humiliations it inflicts on Christ are, if we except the direct and open hostility of Herod, not offences of adversaries, but slights offered by persons whose mind is pre-occupied. Now these are precisely the kinds of humiliations that we have to suffer without our giving any cause for them. They give us a precious opportunity to make a sacrifice for Jesus and to kill "self" by accepting them not only patiently, but willingly and as something we have deserved for all the faults committed in His service. What are they after all in comparison with those He has undergone for us?

III. NAZARETH. "And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth: That it might be fulfilled which was said by the prophets: That he shall be called a Nazarene."

Though the people at the Savior's return from Egypt lacked the right disposition for receiving Him, their indifferent frame of mind could not frustrate God's designs. The Lord had foreseen and foretold all that was

to happen. In an out-of-the-way place of despised Galilee, in a little town against which it was commonly objected that it never had been good enough to harbor a prophet or other distinguished person as citizen within its walls, the Messias, greatest of all prophets and the most distinguished of all human beings who have ever lived or shall live on this earth, was to grow up unnoticed and not spoken of till the hour came in which He would appear solemnly before the people to deliver His message.

Such are God's ways. He does not need the glamor of the world. But the world is the loser if it refuses Him the honor due to Him. The Jews now force Him into the forlorn and obscure little town of Nazareth and thus make it harder for themselves to believe in Him, because according to their common prejudice "nothing good can come out of Nazareth," and the title of "Nazarene" is an appropriate name in their opinion. Yet both their behavior, which forces Christ into obscurity, and the surname which discredits Him, becomes a testimony against them. For only the "Nazarene" corresponds to the description which the prophets have given of the "Nezer," the shoot of the root of Jesse.

*Applications.* 1) As God placed the honor of His Son and the prosperity of His cause in the hands of Israel, so now He entrusts them to us. His glory and the salvation of mankind depends above all on the work of priests and religious. What a tremendous responsibility. God does not

require, with absolute necessity, our work nor even the honor and glory that men give Him. He loses neither majesty nor infinite bliss if He is not honored. For this reason He may make Himself dependent on the doings of human beings. But His honor is our salvation and the salvation of others. Would that no soul were scandalized and driven away from Christ by our sloth and by our lack of a priestly or religious life. Souls firmly founded in their religion will not be led astray by our faults; but there are many who are weak in faith and who cannot separate the human element from the supernatural. We must take men not as they ought to be, but as they are in reality. How insistent and serious is St. Paul when he speaks of this in the epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. Chapter 8). The reasons why the Jews were scandalized in Christ were nugatory in themselves, but such is human nature.

2) If we are denied the honor of Jerusalem and Bethlehem and buried in the obscurity of Nazareth; if we too are called "Nazarenes" by being placed in humble positions or unimportant localities and used only for seemingly unimportant ministrations, this is no reason for complaining, and still less for giving up our work or performing it negligently. Let our only care be that Christ and His cause is not pushed into the background through our fault. Even though no ray of glory falls on us, it ought to be our highest ideal to wear Christ's livery, which was obscurity, lowliness, mockery, contempt. All success in working for Jesus comes from Him, and God is pleased to "make power perfect in infirmity" (2 Cor. 12,9). Is it really no honor to be considered worthy by Christ to wear His livery? Is it no honor if God thinks us virtuous, spiritual,

generous enough to permit of our being treated like His Son? And finally, what is according to St. Paul a sign of predestination, a guarantee of our being among the elect? "Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8,29).

COLLOQUY. Acts of atonement for all the neglect the Savior has been seen to suffer in this meditation; of desire to make Him known and honored; of oblation for this work; and prayer for faithful and devout service of the hidden and despised Savior. "Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths. Direct me in thy truth and teach me; for thou art God my Savior; and on thee have I waited all the day long. Remember O Lord, thy bowels of compassion; and thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world" Ps. 24,4–6).

## Meditation 13

THE FIRST RECEPTION (Matt. 2,1–23. See Med. 7–12)

God has fulfilled His promises; the Messias has appeared in Israel. But concerning the long period from the birth of Jesus until His public appearance at the age of thirty the first evangelist reports only a few events which are intimately connected with the coming of the Gentiles; the flight into Egypt, the return to Palestine, the obscurity of Nazareth. That this selection is made with a purpose is very evident, and manifests the end in view, especially since it is preceded by the genealogy of Christ. It is all the more surprising and all the more significant that the evangelist should begin his gospel in this way, when we bear in mind that his work is intended for Jewish readers.

The first appearance of a king usually serves as a program or a platform for his policies. As such the gospel is conceived by its author. For though according to the prophecies Christ issued from Israel, nevertheless He appeared immediately as the Savior of the whole world. He became this world-Savior in reality only about thirty years later when His own nation killed Him and drove Him to the Gentiles. Until then His people had permitted Him to lead only an oppressed

existence in their midst. All this was foreshadowed at His first appearance. Every detail of Christ's entry into this world is the fulfillment of something that had been foretold and a prophecy of what was to come about during His public career.

Christ came into this world for the sake of the human race. But by the manner in which the evangelist introduces Him to mankind, he immediately makes clear the position which the Lord is to assume here on earth. He describes Him as a true king. As king He is worshipped by the Magi, and as king He is persecuted by Herod. Because He is a king, He is forced into the obscurity of Nazareth. King He remains also whilst as "Nezer" of Jesse He grows up in the forgotten town of Galilee.

Let us ask for the grace to acknowledge Him as our King even in His lowliness and obscurity. Jerusalem, which made an attempt on His life and drove Him out of His realm, did not escape punishment, while the Gentiles, who came to seek and adore Him, did not go unrewarded.

I. THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD. The opening and close of St. Matthew's gospel correspond in unity of idea. In the first scene which the sacred author relates about the Savior, he describes the call of the Gentiles; in the last he records the transfer of the gospel and all its graces to the same Gentiles. In the first, he narrates how the pagan world welcomes Christ; in the last, how

Christ answers this welcome. In the first he tells us how the King of mankind sends a star as His messenger to inform them about His gracious advent, and how, dwelling in a poor lodging and clad in the weakness of a child supported on His mother's lap, He permits the Magi to surround Him with royal splendor by offering the gifts proper to a monarch. In the last lines of the gospel the Conqueror over Israel, over death and over hell sends His apostles to the pagan nations one and all. These disciples and messengers of His, cast out by Israel's priests and scribes and segregated from the concourse of the people since Peter's profession of Christ's divinity, are to give life in Christ through baptism to all who receive them. In His doctrine, His sacraments, and in the Christian rule of life, they are to bring to the pagan world the exchange gift of the Child whom their representatives saluted with homage and offerings.

Now that humble Child is the mighty King, the Conqueror of all His enemies, who enters upon His dominion over the wide world. And He yearns for those who belong to Him, to triumph over all hostile powers until He frees them from the last enemy, death, and takes them with Him into the glory of His eternal Kingdom. They have sought Him in His lowliness and professed their allegiance to Him. Therefore, they are to be His also in glory to share it with Him.

*Applications.* 1) As long as the world lasts, the lowliness in which the Magi saw Christ on His mother's lap,

in a sense endures for us mortals. As in His humiliation He called the Wise Men by means of a star, so now He invites men by the grandeur of His works, above all by the splendor of His Church, the wonderful example which His Saints and faithful servants give, the doctrine which His ministers preach. Happy he who is not scandalized by Christ's humility, helplessness and poverty, but to whom they are rather an inspiration to follow in His footsteps. Happy he who bears the trials and disappointments of this life neither unwillingly nor with merely natural patience and from natural motives, but for the love of Christ, and thus offers the gifts symbolized by the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the Magi. The Savior will one day give him in return what He gave to the first Gentiles. And he too will one day see in this feeble Child the mighty Conqueror and King of the World, inviting him to enter into the glory of his Lord. And in this life he will receive light, strength, and grace to live as a true disciple of the Lord. This is the right view of life and its trials; it alone can give us real peace.

2) How good is it to heed the inspirations of grace. The Magi did not realize what the following of the star or that visit to Bethlehem was to mean for them. It is characteristic of divine inspirations that, as a rule, their ultimate goal is hidden. Herein we must trust God and follow. All will become clear in His own good time.

II. THE KING OF THE JEWS. The beginning and the end of the first gospel correspond in still another respect. The Magi seek the new-born King of the Jews; but the Jews already have a king. Their throne is occupied and instead of rejoicing about the birth of

the Savior the tidings of it causes fear and misgivings. The new-born King is to "save His people from their sins," from eternal death; but when scarcely born, He is sought that He be killed. They do not succeed, it is true, because a pagan country offers Him refuge. But the death sentence pronounced by Herod is only suspended, not cancelled, and the charge for which He must eventually die, is the same. He is "the King of the Jews." As "King of the Jews" He will be accused by His own people before the foreign pagan authority, and as such He will be derided by the soldiers and mocked at by the mob surrounding His cross. "King of the Jews," that title will be proclaimed to the world not only in the language spoken in Palestine, but in the two languages then ruling the world, one the language of commerce, science and art, the other that of the mightiest government the world has ever seen. As "King of the Jews" He will be disowned by His nation before the tribunal of that power which made and unmade kings in those times, and priests and scribes, the leaders of the people, will be very active in this disavowal. These will later officially acknowledge the foreigner, Cæsar Tiberius, as their king, just as at an earlier date all Jewry had hailed and recognized the Idumean Herod as its king.

This act of the nation and of Herod is not only a prophecy, but a solemn warning from God. They try to save themselves by submitting to Herod, but by denying the Messias they cannot save their children; on the contrary they cause the death of many more

than they fear. In Bethlehem and the surrounding districts there will be scarcely a family that does not bewail the murder of a little one. Even so, when later on they want to kill "one man lest the Romans come and take away our place and nation" (John 11,48), they will not prevent the destruction of their city and people and the dispersion of the remnant over the earth.

Finally, to crown all, on both occasions they lose the promise and the desire of their forefathers, the very soul of Israel, the Redeemer; now indeed only for a while, later on forever, and yet He alone is their salvation for time and eternity.

The Jews most probably did not realize what they risked by keeping aloof from the Messias and yielding to their fear of Herod. They entered on a devious and pernicious course in a case wherein the highest blessing was at stake, and continued on the same path, both leaders and people, the former through a fearsome regard for the Romans in order not to endanger their own power and influence, the latter through false deference to the priests and Pharisees. From such sad motives they sacrificed their Messias, lest He create inconveniences or endanger their worldly positions and their material comforts.

*Applications.* 1) Here the powers of darkness and the powers of light are seen in their nature. Will the powers of darkness in their war against Christ ever rest content with partial submission? And will Jesus ever be satisfied with mere neutrality or a half-hearted allegiance? As then,

so for all time His word holds good: "He who is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth" (Luke 11,23). We cannot remain neutral or succeed with half measures and partial concessions when our vocation and worldly interests clash, nor serve both Christ and self, grace and passion. Both powers are very consistent and both demand our all. With us as with the Jews the first step in either direction is decisive. Therefore, no concessions must be made to the world and to passion when our vocation comes in question.

2) What do we gain and what do we lose by making concessions to the world or to our passions, which are not in harmony with our vocation and state? We gain perhaps some little comfort; we may escape an annoyance, a sacrifice hard to nature, we may secure some temporal and temporary advantage. But what do we lose? Precious graces, eternal merit, purity of soul, peace of mind and that necessary self-respect which we need in spiritual life.

For peace of mind is disturbed by a bad conscience and the conviction of one's wretchedness. This feeling of wretchedness is very different from the humility of the Saints and that realization of our faults which is the foundation of humility, zeal and confidence in God. For as long as our conscience attests our good will and sincerity before God, we are assured that God has not cast us away, but bears with our numerous faults and imperfections. But one sad consequence of those compromises by which we become disloyal to our state, consists in this that we feel, so to speak, the contempt that God has for our double dealing, for the unworthiness of our conduct, our despicable weakness and lack of good will. We dare not approach

God, we become despondent and utterly despise ourselves with a sentiment akin to that of Judas. This frame of mind is very dangerous and it is often inflamed by the contempt of those for whom we compromised our state and duty. The world may have some respect for an out and out villain and a consistent sinner, but not for a compromiser. It uses him as long as he serves its purpose, then casts him off, despising him all the while. Did Herod in his heart of hearts think any better of those weak-kneed priests and scribes and all those trembling Hierosolymites for their sycophancy or did he not despise them all the more?

III. THE ROD FROM THE ROOT OF JESSE. Designedly the prophets foretold Jesus as the "rod from the root of Jesse." The evangelist advisedly connects His withdrawal to Nazareth with this prophecy both as a fulfilment of the past and as a type of His life on earth. Christ's entire hidden life is but a continuation of this quiet and humble retreat, but His public life too shows the same character. During His earthly career Christ is never more than tolerated and is never given His right and due. As we shall see in the sequel, whenever His activity promises to become successful and to win the multitudes, He always suffers a reaction, has to yield to the mighty ones in Israel and seek protection in obscurity. For the Jews He is and constantly remains the "Nazarene," repulsed and restricted to Galilee, and even in Galilee He is permitted only the friendship and company of sinners, publicans and the poverty-stricken.

He is and remains poor like His foster-father, the

carpenter of Nazareth. Work, hard work, and for the greater part of His life even rough manual labor, remains His portion. When His work does not earn for Him the necessary bread, He receives it as alms at the hands of some pious women.

The leaders of Israel never allow Him to gain influence. Whenever His Messianic dignity begins to dawn on the people, those in power immediately force Him to retreat, as Herod and Archelaus did in His childhood. He remains the humble "root of Jesse to rule the Gentiles and in Him the Gentiles shall hope" (Rom. 15,12; cf. Isa. 11,10).

The Savior is fully conscious of His rights. He also knows very distinctly to what limits Israel will go in its opposition to Him. And yet He always suffers Himself to be rudely thrust back into the condition so touchingly expressed by the prophet and exemplified in the humble retreat of Joseph in the world-forgotten Nazareth. He realizes that He is tolerated only at the price of His insignificance. Like a criminal He has to seek safety in obscurity, while the real criminals either sit on the throne or rule from a seat of levitical dignity. Yet, from this darkness light shall come for the whole world.

*Applications.* 1) How often does the same happen today in great and small things to Christ, both in His own person and in His bride, the Church, and in His faithful disciples. Later on, when announcing His coming for the last judgment, He says that He will come as a thief in

the night. The same comparison might be used about His first appearance, only in a somewhat different sense. He accepts the rôle pressed upon Him and carries it through, intent upon one thing only, the foundation of the Kingdom of God. He has no selfishness. What a rebuke for our ill-founded demands and our pride. Verily, if He is only God's instrument for man's salvation and the plans of His Father, if He forgets Himself, then priest of Christ, and religious, spouse of Christ, what will you be, what will you do? Seek recognition? Complain about humble work and obscure positions? Oh, let us remember the generous resolutions we made on the day of our ordination or the day of our religious profession. Let us prove to the Savior that those sentiments and those prayers were not mere rhetoric, but spoken in holy earnestness.

And if the work is agreeable to us or the position gives us pleasure, we must, in the words of Father Faber ("Growth in Holiness" chapter 3), "be jealous of any great satisfaction in our pursuits, even if they are works of Christian mercy and love. It is always a pleasure to do good; yet it must be moderated, watched and kept in check, or it will do us mischief before we are aware. The thought of eternity is a good help to this end. It brings down the pride in external work, and takes the brightness and color out of our successes; and this is well, for such brightness and color are nothing more than the reflection of ourselves and our own activity."

2) What is the last and universal reason for the treatment the Lord receives in Israel? Jealousy pure and simple. Herod and Archelaus are jealous of His royal dignity, the leaders of Israel of His influence. They fear to

lose their own dignity and their own influence. Jealousy is today and will be until the end of time, one great reason why Christ and His interests are thrust into the background. It would seem that only a very great saint and an absolutely indolent person are not tempted to be jealous of the success others have in their work for Christ. Few persons possess the great heart of a St. Paul, who was glad that his Christian opponents, the Judaizers, preached with success, though they were animated by envy, caused him unspeakable trouble, and raised against him persecutions without end. If we have success in our work, let us expect jealousy and bear it as Christ bore it. And let us ever be on our guard against the first promptings of this vice. The work others do may seem extravagant, imprudent, unreasonable to us. We may not agree with their principles and their way of acting may grate upon our feelings, but let us only ask one question: "Is Christ made known and loved and served more by it?" If so, let us say with St. Paul: "But what then? So that [if only] by all means, whether by occasion or by truth, Christ be preached. In this I also rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil. 1,18).

And if we believe that their zeal is imprudent and their method of action dangerous, let us first of all, before we take any step, examine ourselves sincerely to discover whether we are not prejudiced and in a way piqued.

COLLOQUY. Gratefully acknowledge Christ as your King and willingly offer yourself for His service in obscurity. Make acts of atonement for the injustice He suffers. Ask for copious grace to follow Him in obscurity. "O eternal Lord of all things, I make my

oblation with Thy favor and help, in the presence of Thine infinite goodness and in the sight of Thy glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly court, protesting that I wish and desire, and that it is my deliberate determination, provided only it be to Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all insults and reproaches, if only Thy Divine Majesty be pleased to choose and receive me to this life and state." (St. Ignatius' prayer.)

## Part III

### THE SAVIOR INTRODUCED TO ISRAEL

### Meditation 14

### "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NIGH"

### (Matt. 3,1–3)

"And in those days cometh John the Baptist preaching in the desert of Judea, and saying: Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by Isaias the prophet, saying: A voice of one crying in the desert. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

Everything was very quiet in the religious life of Israel. The excitement caused by the Magi and the events connected with their coming had subsided long ago. He who had been the centre of it all had been forgotten and had disappeared into the world-forsaken Nazareth. Now suddenly a similar cry rang through the whole land about the approach of the Kingdom of God. A prophet had arisen for the first time after a lapse of centuries. In the desert of Judea the voice was heard which Isaias had already heard in spirit: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

The word went through the cities and villages of Palestine like the roaring of the storm and roused the dormant hopes of the people. What the prophets had foretold and what ages had expected, was it to be fulfilled now? So it seemed. God would now interfere with the course of the world and save His people.

Let us ask for the grace to prepare the way of the Lord and make straight His paths so that He may reign in our hearts and in the hearts of others. May He call us frequently by His grace and help to follow His call.

I. THE PROPHET IN THE DESERT. "In those days cometh John the Baptist preaching in the desert of Judea."

Malachias, the last of the prophets, closed his message with these words: "Behold I will send you Elias the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and strike the earth with anathema" (Mal. 4,5.6). And before this the Lord bade him announce: "Behold I send my Angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face. And presently [i. e., suddenly] the Lord, whom you seek, and the Angel of the testament, whom you desire, shall come to his temple. Behold, he cometh, saith the Lord of hosts." (Mal. 3,1).

After this, prophecy was silent for nearly four hun-

dred years and severe trials came over the people. How earnestly they prayed during the persecutions of the Syrian kings, when Antiochus Epiphanes reared an altar to idols and offered sacrifice to them in the very temple of God. In those days God raised the Machabees and through them freed Israel from the yoke of the foreigners. But alas, the power and the fidelity of the Machabees did not last long. The Romans interfered in their wars, Pompey took the Holy City and the Temple, and he, the pagan, entered the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest was permitted to enter.

Then Rome made the Idumean Herod king of God's chosen people, and after him, when his son Archelaus had been deposed, appointed a Roman governor. The yoke of the foreign masters became even more oppressive and the acts of violence perpetrated by Pontius Pilate were suffered with silent rage.

Meanwhile the highest dignity, that of the high-priest, was held by absolutely worthless men. Annas and his sons one after the other were intruded and deposed, and now Caiphas usurped the position, upheld by Roman force. The rule of sheer might and the spread of a very worldly spirit threatened to ruin the chosen people completely, and no help had been in sight until now. But at this juncture there appeared in the desert of Judea a prophet, an envoy of God, the messenger of the approaching Kingdom of God to whom Malachias had pointed.

When the need is greatest, God is nearest. This

long delay on the part of God is not without reason. For even now, after this long expectation, Israel is not prepared for the coming of the Messias. Therefore, God sends a last messenger, a prophet filled with the spirit of Elias, a man whom Christ Himself will call the greatest among those born of woman, and who is the greatest and highest among all prophets. He is to try whether he cannot prepare Israel for the approach of its Messias. If he fails, what then?

*Applications.* 1) Does it not at times happen to us too, that in our need we cry to God, but have no ear for the lessons and warnings He intends to give us by that need, thus to prepare us for His work? The people of Israel are a telling example of this. How clearly and emphatically had God spoken to them in the course of their history both by His visitations and through the mouth of the prophets, and of how little avail was it all. Even though the false gods against which Elias had waged an incessant war, had been done away with, still up to the days of John the Baptist an Elias was needed to recall the people from their earthly and sensual aims to the Lord of heaven and earth.

The day of God's visitation is always mighty, but also terrible. It is great and full of blessings for those who are ready to accept its graces, but terrible for all who forfeit them. God does not neglect to warn before the decisive action, even at the very last moment. As He sent John the Baptist immediately before the founding of the Kingdom of God, so He sends us an Elias too, when we are going to be confronted with an important decision and

are not ready for it. Even the hardened sinner receives, as a rule, impressive warnings before he dies in an impenitent state. In the same manner God prepares the just for special graces, above all before calling them to a higher life. It is the duty of the individual and his confessor or spiritual director to watch and understand the warning. Otherwise great spiritual harm is done. Therefore, if we notice that divine inspirations occur more frequently or if God manifestly interferes in our lives, let us watch and pray and prepare our hearts for the divine will which in good time shall be made known to us.

2) Where does the great prophet appear? Not in Jerusalem nor in any other city, but in the desert; and all who have the salvation of their souls at heart must come out to him into the desert. God and His prophets have never before acted thus. Hence it is all the more significant. The Israelites must gradually realize that in order to become members of God's Kingdom they have to break not only with their own sinful past, but with the wrong notions and customs of the society in which they live. On this point the Savior will insist very much in His sermon on the Mount.

And so it is today. We live in a world more than half of which is not of our faith and follows notions and engages in occupations and amusements that we cannot share. This is a point too little understood. Catholics, above all our young people, seem to think that they may act as they see their non-Catholic neighbors act, except in cases in which the sinfulness is altogether too evident. They want to know everything and enjoy everything like them; they rush in wherever a door is open, no matter

how questionable the amusement in itself. They follow the fashion, even if it violates modesty and decency, and think themselves fully justified by its being the fashion. They fear nothing more than to appear singular in the eyes of the world. Here it is the duty of the apostle to open their eyes to the truth that they can be only in the world but not of the world and that they, like the first Christians, must bear the stigma of being called singular.

What is of importance for the ordinary Catholic is still more vital for the priest and religious. We must not only be away from the world except when dealing with it according to our vocation, but avoid also the ways of the world. We shall certainly be called singular and be considered rather odd, out of style. But we shall not mind this, for it is our vocation to be such.

II. THE SERMON OF THE BAPTIST. "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

For us Christians the message of the Baptist is not only very intelligible, but in view of the sad condition of Israel, very reasonable and absolutely necessary. For what is the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God? It is a visible society recognizing God as its supreme Lord, instituted for the purpose of serving God according to the laws He has revealed, under divinely appointed authority, and demanding for membership at least the character of Baptism. It is, in a word, the Church of Christ. But this message was not so intelligible for the Jews. A spiritual regeneration seemed unnecessary to them. Those among the Israelites of that day who belonged to the sect of the Sad-

ducees denied the immortality of the soul and man's existence after death. For them a spiritual regeneration was absurd because it was assigned a purpose which to their mind was impossible, namely the attainment of an eternal reward and the escape of an eternal punishment. The Pharisees and the rest of the people believed that their carnal descent from Abraham gave them not only the security of eternal salvation, but an absolute right to Heaven irrespective of the way they lived.

Pharisees and Sadducees explained all the prophecies of the Messias and the Kingdom to be founded by Him in the most materialistic and earthly sense. The gospels, the Jewish literature of the day, the history of Israel until the destruction of Jerusalem and even the ideas prevalent among the Israelites of our own times furnish ample proof for this. The bulk of the nation in Christ's time expected a Messias who would set up a world-wide political kingdom in which the sons of Abraham would possess the riches of the earth and have all other nations for their servants.

But now a man arises whose exterior and circumstances leave no doubt about his divine mission, and the entire burden of his message is in direct opposition to their cherished notions. Yes, he says that the promised Kingdom will be established soon; but he tells them that if they expect to have a place in it, they must do penance, must give up their easy and comfortable lives and confess that they are sinners and have been entirely mistaken. Nay more, they must, according to

him, render atonement and amend their ways unless they are ready to incur God's anger. He tells them that they must not expect earthly greatness, but spiritual treasures; not pleasures for the lower nature of man, but helps to acquire virtue and interior holiness. This is the only way to obtain the fulfilment of the promises made by God to the fathers. He goes even further and attacks their favorite idea by saying that carnal descent from Abraham is by no means a guarantee of partaking in the blessings of the Messias and being admitted to the bliss of Heaven, that on the contrary God's axe is already laid to the root of the tree; so near is God's judgment and punishment for the sons of Abraham.

But, as the sequel will show, the great mass of the nation do not become convinced of the truth which the Baptist is preaching. Woe to man when he attributes his own ideas to God and refuses to rise to the height of the thoughts of the Almighty. Woe to man if he deifies his earthly and base senses, makes a fetish of his own wretchedness and sacrifices everything else to this idol. The Baptist warns: "Be converted, give up your false notions, change your minds, do penance, if indeed you wish to have a part in the Kingdom of God." But he too will be sacrificed to the false idol and in the end the nation itself will be made a burning holocaust on its altar. And yet, they think they are zealous for the law and glory of God.

*Applications.* 1) If we wish to have a part in God's

Kingdom, we too, above all we priests and religious, must do lifelong penance. We dare not be indifferent about our sins and evil inclinations. While they must not discourage us nor fill us with an immoderate and slavish fear, which would dishonor the kind and merciful God, we must not forget that we have sinned and daily commit many faults, for which we must atone, and that we must do violence to our fallen nature by the practice of interior and exterior mortifications and humiliations. It is a precious advice of spiritual men that in the daily examination of conscience we should not only try to find the faults committed during that day, but also ask ourselves which acts of mortification and humiliation we have performed that day.

2) It is very easy to deceive oneself in spiritual life by placing, so to speak, one's own self with all its faults and foibles into the divine essence and then assuming the dictates of that self to be God's will. The worst manifestation of this deception is fanaticism and spiritual infatuation. Misery is brought upon the world, the Church and society not only by sloth in God's service, but also by false zeal. How bitterly does St. Paul complain of this, he who had to suffer so much from the "Judaizers," those Christian zealots who were converted from Judaism and maintained that the levitic law of the Old Testament ought to be observed by the Christians. "I bear witness, he says, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge (wanting in discretion). For they not knowing the justice (i. e. the law) of God and seeking to establish their own, have not submitted themselves to the justice (i. e. the law) of God" (Rom. 10, 2.3). He accuses them of seeking only their own aggrandizement (Gal. 4,17).

God alone knows how much of that anxiety to make the Church or a religious organization respected in the world and, therefore, to stress more worldly points, is in reality only self-love.

Again, a great deal of harm can be done by those who have charge of others, as priests, superiors, teachers, when they impose on those entrusted to them their own self-fashioned spirituality which hardly agrees with the doctrine of the Church, or their own private devotions which are based on mere sentiment instead of Catholic dogma. Time and again the Holy Office has of late years been compelled to censure books, devotions, representations of this kind. Let us be wise and strictly follow the guidance of the Church, lest we ruin ourselves and others.

III. THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY. "This is he that was spoken of by Isaias the prophet, saying: "A voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."

The Baptist announces a Kingdom of God other than that which the Jews expect and desire. He is the precursor of the real Kingdom of Heaven, in which God reigns and man submits to Him without reserve and thus finds out that to serve God means to rule. For the Baptist is "he that was spoken of by Isaias the prophet, saying: A voice of one crying [a voice that cries out] in the desert, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." In the fortieth chapter, from which these words are taken, Isaias begins by order of God to console the people in the Babylonian exile. Salvation will come, the Lord Himself will lead

His people back through the desert, as of old under Moses and the fathers He had led them through the Red Sea. The prophet already hears the voice of the precursor who according to Oriental custom precedes the monarch to prepare the way. Soon the Lord Himself will come and direct their return.

But the liberation from Babylonian slavery as well as the exodus from Egypt is but a type of that great liberation which the Messias will effect. The Lord Himself will come again to free His people and establish His great kingdom. John now appears in the desert to prepare the way of the Messias.

*Applications.* 1) Even if man puts himself and his own ideas in the place of God and His decrees, the Lord does not immediately abandon him to his fate, obstinacy in error does not come about without man's fault. For in spite of that pious halo with which man surrounds his own views and inclinations, the warnings he receives from others and from his own conscience urge him to examine them. This happened to the Jews; for to them came the prophets and finally the Baptist, that "voice crying in the desert" foretold by the prophets. He indeed announces to them the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven; but at the same time he clearly states the conditions on which one may have a share in its blessings. "Do penance," change your lives, correct the perversion of your minds. In spite of all these admonitions the Jews hold fast to their notions of the kingdom and do not want a real "Kingdom of Heaven" to be constituted in their midst.

They may insist on the promises made to their fore-

fathers, but in spite of this religious veneer, that which animates them is merely the cogitation of men. And if they will not surrender those ideas and can not abandon self, it is only their old characteristic stubbornness, their unmeasured conceit, which closes against them the road to the true Kingdom of God and to the religious spirit. In the final instance this blindness is voluntary, is freely chosen, is culpable.

Judaism is wrecked on "the rock which is Christ" through its own guilt, even though the priests and leaders declare: "We have a law; and according to the law he ought to die" (John 19,7). This law, however, is not a divine law, but the perversion of a divine law. This law causes not only Christ's death, but the ruin of the perverters.

Here then we have a most striking lesson of how we must not believe that we alone have correct notions about spiritual life, the truly ecclesiastical spirit or any other matter belonging to our vocation and state. We must always remain open to conviction and to the direction of those whom God has placed over us, be they superiors or spiritual directors. We may ask the Holy Ghost to enlighten them, but when they insist, let us yield to their decision and not cling to our notions. Docility is a great virtue and a good exercise of humility.

For religious there is still another matter in which they can be just as perverse as the Jews. At first sight this matter seems to have very little to do with spirituality, and yet it is of the utmost importance, because it simply kills all spiritual life and endangers one's vocation. It is one's own health and what one thinks is required for it. A religious above all must not think that he alone knows

what is necessary for or conducive to his health and that he alone knows the exact state of his physical condition. The only way for him when he thinks he is ill, is to make the proper report to the proper persons, and then let superiors and the physician decide what is to be done. At times this will demand a great deal of self-abnegation. But if he insists on special treatment or special measures and medicines against the opinion of the physician and the will of superiors, he will never have peace of mind, but work himself into a mood which renders spiritual life impossible; he will be the constant prey of the devil's illusions and become liable to lose his vocation. If the good God really permits superiors and physicians to make a serious blunder and by their decisions shorten his life, his eternal gain will be all the greater. As a martyr of obedience he will die a happy death.

2) God always keeps His promises, though not always in the way man expects. Perhaps we too, after reading the prophecies concerning the Messianic kingdom and the great precursor that was to announce it, naturally would have been keenly disappointed at first and found it hard to acknowledge that this man in the desert, clad only in a garment made of camel's hair and living on a scanty fare of locusts and wild honey, this man who had spent most of his life in the wilderness, this man who did not preach in Jerusalem but amidst such primitive surroundings, was the individual whose coming had been heralded by the great Isaias. Faith, always a virtue, depends on our free will, and for this reason is clouded in some obscurity. It never is such that one who is stubborn can not find reasons enough for refusing to believe. And besides good

will it demands careful attention and study. The shallow mind does not see the work of God. This is above all the case concerning that article which in itself is most consoling, the guidance of Divine Providence. Our life often enough seems to be a confused muddle of human ignorance and passion and we feel that we are merely the victims of circumstances. In reality the guiding hand of God is never withdrawn from the helm of our life's boat. Nothing happens by chance; God has calculated every detail and event of our life. Let us learn to acquire more and more of this practical faith. We often pray for an increase of faith, and this means for an increase of our capacity to apply the doctrines of faith to our practical life. That unkempt preacher in the desert often appears to us in what the natural man will call the ignorance and even the malice of men.

COLLOQUY. Sorrow for our want of docility and submission to God. Prayer for true and unselfish devotion to the holy will of God. "O God, to whom every heart is open, every desire patent, no secret hidden, purify our souls by the infusion of the Holy Ghost, that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily praise Thee" (prayer in the votive mass of the Holy Ghost).

## Meditation 15

### JOHN THE BAPTIST (Matt. 3,4–6)

"And the same John had his garment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the country about the Jordan: and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."

The sermons of the Baptist exhorted to penance, and penance was preached also by his whole appearance and mode of life. The common people were deeply impressed and the whole country was roused. A veritable migration of nations went into the desert and not only from Jerusalem, the capital and religious centre of Palestine, but from the provinces, from Judea and all the districts around the Jordan. It seemed as though Israel were undergoing a great change of spirit. The people confessed their sins and as a sign of conversion had themselves baptized by John.

Solemn, indeed, was the spectacle witnessed in those days at the river Jordan. The crowds gathered around the prophet and impressed by his words, entered into themselves and were immersed in the waters of the river that they might die to sin and wait for the coming of the Kingdom of God in holy dispositions.

Let us ask for the grace to become thoroughly convinced that God's Kingdom can be firmly founded in our hearts only in so far as we die to ourselves and to our sins and inordinate passions.

I. THE EXTERNAL APPEARANCE OF THE BAPTIST. "The same John had his garment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey."

Everything in the appearance of the Baptist harmonizes: the desert in which he dwells; his ascetic and haggard form; his garment of camel's hair; his food, consisting of locusts and wild honey, and the topic of his sermon, penance. Everything has the character of gravity and severity. Only one thing does not fit in with all the rest, namely that the real reason of his appearance and activity is the "glad tidings" of the near approach of the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet John is appointed by God as the last messenger of that time of grace. Therefore, it is certain that as he is, he is in the right place.

Indeed, every grace of God is a double-edged sword, and the greater the grace, the greater is the responsibility of him who receives it. It rests with him whether he will waste and forfeit it or whether he is prepared for it, will receive it properly and make good use of it. The entire history of Israel shows how necessary a preparation is for the great favor offered to them. Not even with all his severity can the Baptist rouse the higher classes of the people from their spiritual

lethargy, and with the common people he succeeds only in so far as they are of a contrite mind for a brief period. When the Savior begins to preach, they cling more tenaciously to their favorite errors and false aspirations. The Baptist never fully succeeds in moving them to accept entirely and to use properly the greatest graces ever extended to any people.

*Applications.* 1) For us too the grace of God can easily be changed from a blessing into a curse unless we receive and treat it with a holy seriousness. It is, indeed, a heavenly gift, but it makes its demands on him who receives it. And the greater it is, the more of particular and extraordinary favors it includes, the higher, the more weighty, the more contrary to our natural inclinations are the demands it makes. Israel had a very extraordinary, a sublime vocation in being destined to bring the Savior into the world. It was intended to occupy a unique position in the history of mankind. But because it corresponded so badly to this vocation and made such a bad use of its graces, it has become an example which shows the whole world into what an abysmal ruin God's graces lead him who does not receive them with the proper spirit and who does not co-operate with them in the right manner.

Israel's vocation was a priestly and religious vocation. In how many priests and religious has Israel's fate been repeated because they have not accepted or at least not used the graces of their vocation with a holy earnestness and seriousness. It is very true that God at times draws a soul "with the cords of Adam, with the bonds of love"

(Osee 11,4); in other words, in the choice of one's vocation natural motives may have some influence, though they are not the entire nor the decisive reasons for becoming a priest or religious. But such motives and such an attitude of mind must gradually be corrected and the supernatural view of one's vocation must become more and more predominant.

Likewise it may happen that though the choice has been made in a thoroughly supernatural manner, this basic attitude may, in the stress of work and human frailty be partially or wholly forgotten, and natural motives may assume a greater or less control over the priest and religious, and thus taint his work and diminish his merit considerably. When we become aware of this, let us take effective measures immediately and consistently. There are chiefly two means by which we can correct the defects of the original choice of a vocation and remedy the faulty intention that comes later on. Prayer and above all meditation is one; enduring the trials, opposition, disappointments, failures, and all the other difficulties met with in vocational work in the spirit of faith, is the other. It is on the whole very good for all of us from time to time to make our particular examen on purity of intention.

2) Though the external appearance of the Baptist is so stern and his discourse so serious, they are none the less the source of great joy. Salvation is nigh and the aim of all the penance which he demands, is not self-torture, but the attainment of the bliss of the Messianic Kingdom established by Christ. We are too apt to look only at the dark side of the work of conversion and penance. Let us not omit to view it also from the bright side. It is not

merely a bitter medicine that must be taken in order to escape eternal death, but also a sweet manna strengthening the soul, because it gives a peace that no earthly pleasure can produce. When penance is preached to us or when God by His lights and inspirations invites us to acts of mortification, it is the good tidings of the nearness of salvation that is announced to us. Not without reason does Holy Church in the preface of the Masses during Lent say that by the bodily fast God elevates the mind, grants virtue and rewards in abundance. When the Lord later on will tell His followers that when they fast they are not to make an appearance that nobody likes to look at, but to anoint their heads and wash their faces (Matt. 6,16.17), He not merely warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but instructs us in what spirit we are to do penance.

II. THE COMMOTION AMONG THE PEOPLE. "Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the country around the Jordan."

The immediate effect of St. John's preaching is overwhelming. Certainly the Kingdom of Heaven of which he speaks, attracts the people very powerfully. For as is recorded in the history of those days, even quite a number of imposters and deceivers precisely at this period find adherents in Israel because they know how to utilize to their advantage the great expectation of the people, and there is a conviction prevalent among the nation that the time foretold by Daniel is at hand. False prophets as a rule find credence more easily than true ones, just as quack doctors and lawyers do better business than the professional men.

But here the commotion is not due to a promise of mere visionary grandeur; for the preacher does not flatter national prejudices and sensual aspirations. Nor may we say that the office of prophet is the main cause of it; for prophets before him failed often enough to create an impression among the Jews. The effect in this case undoubtedly is, at least to a great extent, due to the seriousness, austerity and manifest holiness of the preacher. He complies with the demands of penance in his own person before he proposes them to others. He uses not only his magnetic word, but his own example, to rouse the sleeping conscience of his co-religionists. He is in earnest when he preaches penance; therefore, he can make others serious and rouse sentiments of penance in them.

*Applications.* 1) If the priesthood and, in a way, the religious state has the vocation to bring Christ to the nations and the nations to Christ, the individual priest and religious must be a Baptist, a forerunner of the Savior for the souls entrusted to his care. The message they have to announce finds a ready response in the hearts of their charges, and their official position in the Church introduces them as Christ's messengers, so that it is not necessary for them first to establish their claim to a hearing. But the secret of eminent success in this work lies, next to the grace of God and much prayer, in this that the preacher and teacher exhort not only by their words, but by their personality and mode of life. This is the reason why Saints often have achieved superhuman results; even viewing it from a merely natural point we must say that

only conviction, practical and living conviction, can produce conviction in others. To arouse fanaticism is often easy enough; but to produce a serious, sacrificing, constant religious disposition in others is possible only to those who are themselves thoroughly imbued with it. "Words teach, example attracts" says an old Latin proverb. How important is it, therefore, that we do ourselves what we want others to do. And if our words fail of success and seem to make no impression, it may be advisable to examine ourselves how far we practice what we preach.

2) There is also something very consoling in this success of the Baptist. We may not be so gifted as others nor have so many natural helps in our work as we should like. Our limited resources can be amply supplemented by personal holiness of life, penance and prayer. The work of grace is not due solely to our own efforts, but to the help of God. St. John Baptist Vianney, the great parish priest of Ars, was so meagerly endowed that he passed the examinations in the seminary only through the favor of the examiners, but he did more for the salvation of souls than the most eloquent missionary. And of a very successful and pious physician people used to say that he cured by his prayers as much as by his treatments. Piety and virtue do not depend on mental and natural gifts, but on the grace of God and our good will. The grace of God is never wanting and good will is always in our power.

III. THE BAPTISM OF PENANCE. "And they were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."

The crowds that came to the Baptist in the desert, at least in the beginning were impressed by him. They

acknowledged the necessity of doing penance, because they confessed their sins. John accepted their confession and baptized them in the Jordan. This baptism is the culminating point of his mission and gives him his name. But John cannot cleanse their souls from sin. As he himself proclaims, his is only a baptism in water, a kind of consecration or blessing for those who enter upon the state of penance. Those who receive it must prepare the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and make straight the paths of the Lord by their penitential spirit and works. It is not the water of the Jordan which operates, but it is the pouring of the water coupled with a real detestation of sin and sincere conversion to God, which enables the subject of this ceremony to receive the graces of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Man alone can not do much in the work of redemption and sanctification. He is able to sin and stain his soul; only God can cleanse it. But if man does his part by a real detestation of sin and a sincere conversion, God will not refuse to do the rest. Penance must begin with a confession made not merely by the lips, but by the innermost heart, that one has done wrong against God, has defiled his soul and needs a purification which God alone can make. Fully penetrated by this conviction, the penitent openly confesses his need of being cleansed, as the penitents at the Jordan did, who stepped into the water of the river to be immersed by God's messenger. The external sign in the case of the people that come to the Jordan is all the

more necessary, because here not so much the secret sins of the individual have to be atoned for as the public perversity of the nation, that threatens to frustrate God's plan and has to be counteracted by public penance and public conversion. Only something external can unite a society, and all social action of necessity is external. Hence all penance done by society must be exterior penance.

*Applications.* 1) Do we not overlook the necessity of "social" penance a little too much? We certainly can not deny that society, the civil and political body to which we belong, and in part even the portion of the ecclesiastical body, if not in its chosen ministers and religious, at least in the souls entrusted to their care, offend God and to a greater or less extent transgress His law. The social and public life of today in many points is in open contradiction to His laws. Penance for this is necessary, just as prayer for the world is necessary. Now we as priests and religious must not only pray in the name of the world, but also do penance in its name. We read in the lives of some Saints how God made them victims for the sins of the world. We all understand how, for instance in the devotion to the Sacred Heart, we atone not only for our own offences, ingratitude, irreverence against the Blessed Sacrament, but also for the faults committed against it by others. The Lenten fast and the penance performed on Ember days are a social penance. If we are not able to observe the abstinence from food prescribed on those days, we ought to do some other penance instead. The penances practiced in

public by religious orders are of the same nature. But whatever we do, let us not forget our duty to perform "social" penances.

2) What a difference between the baptism of penance and our Sacrament of Penance! How easy is it for us to obtain forgiveness for our sins in comparison with what the people had to do before the foundation of the Church. Then only perfect contrition could cleanse from mortal sin and all depended in the main on the effort of the sinner. Now we need not be anxious whether our sorrow is sufficient; for if we have at least some, the sins are forgiven. This ought to be a powerful motive to make good use of the Sacrament of Peace and Reconciliation with God.

3) Let us not neglect exterior practices. They produce and promote the interior spirit. The Church makes us bow low and strike our breast in the "Confiteor." Another time-honored practice is to pray with extended arms, to kneel while praying. Nay the very folding of our hands in prayer originally had a penitential significance. It was intended to express the truth that before God we are like criminals whose hands are tied, lest they do harm or escape the avenging judge. Let us faithfully observe these pious practices and urge our people to do the same.

COLLOQUY. Humble confession of our sinfulness. Prayer for the true penitential spirit. *"Confiteor."*

## Meditation 16

### THE THREATENING JUDGMENT (Matt. 3,7–10)

"And seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them: Ye brood of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore, fruit worthy of penance. And think not to say within yourselves: We have Abraham for our father. For I tell you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. For now is the axe laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire."

In striking contrast to the people are the Pharisees, the "holy ones" of Israel and the Sadducees, the "bon-ton society." Many of them, too, come to the Baptist, not indeed to follow his admonitions to penance, but in order to see whether anything is done against the law. The prophet tells them plainly what they have to expect unless they are converted. Membership in the chosen people of God and descent from Abraham avails nothing. This is the last hour before either salvation or condemnation is dealt out.

What a picture is this! The mighty prophet fired with a holy anger and these self-satisfied Pharisees

and Sadducees. The messenger of the glad tidings becomes the herald of the most frightful judgment, and of a judgment, too, that is hanging over the sons of Abraham, who are firmly convinced that their carnal extraction is the inviolable pledge of greatest security.

Let us ask for the grace of always remaining clearly conscious of the fact that neither our state nor our dignity renders us secure, but only the spirit of the children of God, and that for the unworthy the graces of their state are turned into curses, if they are trees not yielding good fruits.

I. PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES. "Seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming." The Sadducees are the aristocratic party, rationalists in their religious views and absolutely worldly in their lives. They deny the immortality of the soul and every form of retribution after death. The leading members of the priesthood, among them even the highpriests Annas and Caiphas, belong to them. They despise the people and keep aloof from them. Although the religious direction of the nation and its government in political and social matters by right belongs to them, they are to a great extent kept in check by the Pharisees on account of the influence the latter have with the people, and on account of the great number of Pharisees who are members of the Sanhedrin or High Council.

Phariseeism as a school of thought and a religious party is correct in its fundamental principles and the ultimate aim for which it was founded. The Phari-

sees believe in the spiritual nature and immortality of the soul, the necessity of leading a moral life and in an eternal reward and punishment after death. In opposition to the religious liberalism of the Sadducees they defend conservatism in religion and profess great reverence for tradition. But unhappily too many of them, and especially those with whom the Lord has to deal, make a veritable caricature of religion and religious observances. In their desire to keep the law of Moses intact they make religion a constricting and suffocating web of external regulations and ceremonies that are an outrage to common sense, but the observance of which is represented as more important than the Mosaic law itself. With great narrowness of mind and hardness of heart they combine unbearable conceit, hypocrisy and imperiousness. They degrade Almighty God to the condition of a debtor, who for their observance of mere externals owes them all the blessings of time and eternity. Although they hold the common "crowd that knoweth not the law" in supreme contempt and oppress them by the harshness of their doctrine and the weight of their exactions, their influence with the people is supreme. They enjoy the highest regard on account of their imaginary holiness of life. Since the Scribes or teachers of religion belong to their class, every word of theirs is implicitly believed and every command carried out blindly.

Thus both Pharisees and Sadducees, the worldlings and the so-called saints, are a cause of the temporal and eternal ruin of the nation.

*Applications.* 1) Here we see how the holiest thing can degenerate unless unselfish humility and sincere submission to God animates man. In the last analysis both Pharisees and Sadducees are godless, because they place themselves and their own notions on God's throne. And both parties, precisely on account of their false religious character, are all the more disgusting and repulsive. The ruling priests become unscrupulous politicians, because in their eyes mastery and control are more important than the sanctity of the priesthood. Those pseudo-pious Pharisees are still more contemptible because their pretended sanctity serves only as a mask behind which a proud, selfish, cunning and heartless character is but clumsily concealed.

Neither the priesthood nor the religious state nor religious zealotry are a sure protection against the worst moral corruption unless both priests and religious esteem the sanctity required by their state above everything else and unless the zealot in all humility remains ever conscious of his weakness and sinfulness.

Without this humility, such people not only ruin themselves, but drag with them into perdition whole nations trusting in their consecrated character and the holiness of the institution to which they belong. This they do all the more certainly and imperceptibly because their state of life surrounds them with a certain halo.

What then are we to do? First of all, we must remain humble and conscious of our responsibility. Therefore, let us never become resentful and vindictive when we are not treated with that reverence which is due to our state and office. This kind of humility is necessary for us. It may at times be necessary to urge in a modest and patient

way the claim of the dignity of our state, but never and at no time should this be done with a resentful spirit and in a vindictive manner nor for the purpose of taking revenge for the feeling of pique.

Secondly, let us never use our position and state for obtaining temporal advantages, above all comforts, luxuries, money or anything of that kind. Good and faithful Catholics are only too glad to give expression to their reverence and esteem by means of gifts, donations, services and the like. Let us not forget that this is no duty on their part and that we have no right to claim these privileges. Nor should we by clever management try to secure them. Thus we must be mindful of our responsibility to God.

Finally, let us practice a simple and humble piety and in this point place ourselves so to speak on the same level with the faithful laity. This will remind us that, though raised through God's mercy to a higher estate, we are nevertheless moulded of the same clay as the rest of men and have no greater claim than they before the Almighty.

2) Would it have been correct for any one to refuse to go to the Baptist or make light of his ministry because those despicable Sadducees and Pharisees went out to the Jordan? The sacredness of his work was not impaired by their hypocritical action. Unhappily to this very day we find everywhere in the Church of God pharisaical persons who make piety their spiritual sport and discredit it in the eyes of many. Too often they render themselves rather prominent at special devotions and in certain works and institutions approved by the Church. Let us never fall into the mistake of condemning the devotion, the work, the institution on account of these caricatures. An old proverb

says wherever God builds a temple, the devil erects a chapel for himself too. Our Lord will come to the Baptist in spite of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

II. THE JUDGMENT OF WRATH. "Ye brood of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of penance. For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast in the fire."

When John observes the Pharisees and Sadducees listening to him, he no longer controls his indignation. He calls them a "brood of vipers" and thus compares them to that species of snake which sneaks about to kill with its poisonous bite unsuspecting persons. For them the coming visitation of God is not the beginning of salvation, but a judgment. "Now the axe is laid to the root of the trees." God's wrath, not His grace is over their heads. The worldly Sadducean priest is no better than the sanctimonious Pharisee: both are an abomination in the sight of the All-Holy God. Neither will find an escape when this judgment of wrath breaks upon them. There is only one salvation for both: "fruits worthy of penance," change of heart, conversion, atonement.

However, it must not be a pharisaical penance, but a real change of heart, not merely pious sighs, but an efficacious conversion which must bear a fruit proving a serious interior change, showing that the exterior penance is but the result of interior contrition. This

they are to seek from the Baptist, not merely ablutions and external rites.

It was very bold on the part of the Baptist thus openly to rebuke the prominent men of Israel. As the sequel will show, it was his ruin. Enlightened as he was about the condition of his people, he knew what he risked. But if he wanted to effect complete conversion among the common people, he had to counteract the baneful influence of the leaders and for this purpose he had to tear the mask from their faces. Christ Himself was later on to do the same thing. John sought nothing in his vocation but the fulfilment of the divine will and he sacrificed himself for this duty. He had no human respect.

*Applications.* 1) In the faithful exercise of our vocation we may at times have the unpleasant task of rebuking influential persons and thereby incur their anger, which they can readily wreak upon us. More frequently we shall have to overcome human respect in other ways. We may have to refuse insistent demands, because not harmonizing with our conscience and our sacred obligations. We may have to appear odd and singular in the company of those who follow laxer principles and explanations than those to which we can subscribe.

Human respect is one of the greatest curses of society. It is but right that in purely secular affairs we should avoid singularity and pay due regard to the customs and manners of those among whom we live. In merely political questions the will of the majority may well have the force of law; but this principle must not be advocated in that

realm which is not based on the consent of the governed, in religion and morality, in the realm of conscience. For in this realm we have a monarchy in the strictest sense, that of God and the Church with Peter at its head.

And yet the transfer of the power of the majority is so easily made into the realm of conscience. He who does not agree with it, must suffer. Conscience must make him at times appear odd and singular, and this is hard. It requires the courage of the Baptist. We must fear God alone, and be thoroughly convinced of our total dependence on Him.

2) We must be outspoken and honest not only when duty requires it in dealing with others, but above all with ourselves. Therefore, we must attack every vestige of the spirit of the Pharisees and Sadducees that may be found in us, and attack it with the determination and energy of St. John wherever we find it.

3) That "brood of vipers" which John had among his audience had not become such all at once nor was the axe laid at the root of trees as soon as Pharisaism and Sadduceeism began to crop out in Israel. The first Pharisees were correct in their strict observance of the laws of Moses; they justly wanted to oppose the laxity and the encroachments of paganism that was creeping into their nation. And even the Sadducees owed their origin to the glorious Machabees who came into power during the struggles against the Syrians. But when the Machabees had become the ruling princes, they gradually assumed too many of the ways of the pagan rulers with whom they had to deal, and fell in with their views and manners.

And when the Pharisees grew in influence, they became conceited tyrants in spiritual matters and in their efforts to protect the laws of Moses they lapsed into formalism, added observances that were ridiculous and gradually placed all sanctity in externals. At the same time they became enamored of the respect and influence they enjoyed and instead of working for God, worked for themselves. Thus personal interests took the place of duty and in the case of the former developed into Sadduceeism, in that of the latter into the Pharisaism which now appear before the Baptist. For us this phenomenon contains the great lesson that neither in our own case nor in that of others, should we trust blindly the demands which promote our personal interest and at the same time serve high and ideal causes. We deceive ourselves by the great cause that seems to be served, but in reality we serve only selfish ends. Whenever we are inclined to think that God's interests are endangered in a matter that concerns our personal temporal interests, our influence, reputation, comfort and the like, we must be very careful and rather suffer personal loss, slight or discomfort, for fear of becoming either Pharisees or Sadducees.

III. THE SUBTERFUGE. "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father. For I tell you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

The soil in which these two noxious weeds of Phariseeism and Sadduceeism can grow together so luxuriously in spite of the deadly opposition between them, is the consciousness of Israel's being the one chosen

people of God and the heir of the promises made to Abraham and his descendants. It was this thought that aroused Matthias and his heroic sons, the Machabees, to rise against the Syrian oppressors of their religion and to foil their attempts at forcing the people into idolatry. This same thought moved the Pharisees to form a distinct class and to avoid all that smacked of paganism, to steer clear of the worldly tendencies of the later Machabean princes and even of the bulk of the people, who did not live up to all the intolerable "laws of man" which they added to the laws of God.

Now when the Baptist appears, they oppose their national pride to his admonitions to penance and conversion. "A son of Abraham needs no conversion, God is pledged by his word to take him to Heaven." Such is the silent answer of the Pharisees. And to this they add an unbounded personal conceit, which makes them think themselves absolutely holy, the only genuine Israelites, faithful and exact in everything even the smallest external detail. They are every inch of them zealots for the law of Moses and what they consider holiness. God is merely their debtor who has to fulfill all His promises just as they interpret them. The Sadducees, denying the immortality of the soul and life after death, can not see the necessity of conversion. All they expect of God is temporal prosperity and that, in their opinion, is the only blessing God has promised them. They possibly see the necessity of worshipping God and avoiding idolatry, which is the only sin for which their ancestors suffered persecution and op-

pression by their enemies. But at present there is not a trace of idolatry in the nation, and the exterior worship of God in the temple is performed by them with a splendor that has been surpassed at no time of the history of their nation. Penance and conversion are therefore not necessary and it is a grotesque idea to demand them from Israel.

But in spite of all this, the inexorable prophet at the Jordan not only preaches penance, but in thundering accents threatens them with the wrath of their God, mercilessly destroys their subterfuge and dispels their fancied security. "Do not imagine," he says, "that you can protect yourselves against the impending judgment by the pretext that you are sons of Abraham. Flesh and blood do not count with God, but only the right condition of the soul. If He wants sons of Abraham in order to fulfill His promises in them, He can raise them from these stones which cover the banks of the river." They can learn from the history of their people that mere carnal descent is not the pledge for receiving the blessings of Abraham: Ismael, Esau, the sons of Cetura, Abraham's wife after Sara's death, are all descendants of the first patriarch and yet not heirs of his blessings and God's promises. Only those are the true sons of Abraham and heirs of the promises, who imitate the virtues of Abraham and, as the Lord will soon say, who do the works of Abraham (John 8,39).

*Applications.* 1) Priests and religious are often accused of pride and a domineering spirit. Undoubtedly in most

cases this charge is entirely unfounded. The priest has to defend the sacred interests and the rights of God. Among the rights of God belongs the priesthood to which He has entrusted exclusively the administration of the means of grace, the religious instruction and the spiritual direction of the people. But God has placed all these powers in the hands of poor human beings who like the rest of mankind may experience that it is sweet to rule. Thus a danger may arise of claiming for the rights and powers of the priesthood a wider scope than is proper. This is done at first in the true or imagined interest of the priestly office, but gradually and imperceptibly also in the personal interest of the priest. If an objection is made to this, how easily an echo is heard of those words: "Are we not the sons of Abraham?" "Are we not Aaron's heirs?" The less we claim of honor, consideration, privilege, the better for us. The more "democratic" we are, the less we make of slights, the readier we show ourselves to accept corrections or rebukes from those who like the Baptist speak in the name of God, the worthier are we to participate in the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

2) The Pharisees did not believe that they needed correction and penance because they were too holy and virtuous and God owed them almost more than He could pay them. The Sadducees explained too frivolously the immunity from God's anger, which their descent from Abraham gave them. Yet on the day of judgment the son of Abraham will be dealt with according to the same laws and with the same rigor as all mankind. It is profitable for the priest and religious to bear in mind that they too will have to meet their Judge at the end of the world

together with the rest of the human race, and at the same time and in the same place. No courtesy will be extended, no consideration shown to them. Before the whole world we shall be examined and judged, and the prerogatives of our state will only make the examination and judgment all the more serious. Hence, here on earth our human frailty and our added responsibilities make penance and correction all the more necessary for us. We wonder at times how Saints like Teresa of Avila can in all seriousness speak in such contemptuous terms of themselves, their numerous faults and their need of penance and correction by those placed over them. It is impossible to assume that they deceived themselves; for they received greater light and a much deeper insight from God than we, and this light can not be the source of self-deception. They saw the truth as it is. Penance and correction and conversion are all the more necessary, the greater is the dignity which the merciful God bestows on us.

COLLOQUY. Humble confession of our unworthiness and prayer for the spirit of humble, unselfish consciousness of guilt and the most devoted confidence in the grace and mercy of God. (Ps. 129) *"De profundis."*

## Meditation 17

### THE BAPTIST AND THE MIGHTIER ONE
### (Matt. 3,11.12)

"I indeed baptize you in water unto penance, but he that shall come after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his floor: and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

The great Baptist is but the forerunner of the Messias, who is so far above him that for John it would be an unmerited honor to render Him the lowest service of a slave. Also his baptism has value only as a confession of the spirit of penance in which one looks forward to the coming Redeemer, who will forgive sins, fill those of a contrite heart with the Holy Ghost and destroy the obstinate with fire. He comes as the judge of Israel to separate the chaff from the wheat; for no longer may they be together. The master of the house will thoroughly cleanse his floor. Woe to him that is only chaff; he shall be thrown into the fire which nobody can extinguish and which will consume him.

The most important moment has arrived for Israel.

The nation stands on the threshold of the Messianic period. You see at the Jordan crowds from every part of Palestine, every class is represented. You find among them members of all the leading parties. The forerunner has completed the essential part of his task. Presently will appear He for whom John had to prepare the way. At this juncture, John once more raises his voice to impress on the souls of all the full importance of the hour. "Israel," he says, "thy fate is decided here and now; thou standest before thy Lord and Judge."

Let us ask for the grace to recognize fully and appreciate properly in our thoughts and actions the sublime dignity of Christ and His work, and to realize thoroughly the greatness of the divine mercy which has called us unto the New Covenant, and has made us instruments in carrying it out.

I. THE GREATNESS OF HIM WHO IS TO COME. "He that shall come after me, is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear."

Israel has grown in importance as the time approaches for the fulfilment of the divine promises. God's revelation is to reach its climax and consummation in Christ. Now Israel's sole and yet sublime reason for existence consists in this that it is to prepare the world for Christ. Thus its history really reaches its zenith now when Christ comes. At this juncture the importance is, as it were, summed up and embodied

in the person and the mission of the Baptist. If others have been the root, the trunk, the branch of the tree, he is the stem which is to bear directly the flower and the fruit for which the tree has been planted.

Thus he is both in his position and character the greatest among those born of woman. The whole country looks up to him as a mighty prophet, the crowds bend to the touch of his hand; and he can show an intrepid face to the rulers of Israel and they dare not contradict openly the stinging rebukes he addresses to them. They have only courage enough to plot against him in secret, aided by the Herodian faction.

And yet, this great man with all his power is not the master, though many are prone to see in him the Messias. No, he is only the servant of Him who will come after. He that will follow in time is leader by nature; He is the Mighty One, mightier than the Baptist, and the great prophet at the Jordan declares himself unworthy of carrying His sandals after Him, as the lowest slaves in a household are wont to do for their masters. How great, then, must this Mighty One be. John does not speak in exaggeration. We are bound to believe that what the Baptist says here is as true as God is true.

*Applications.* 1) How great is our dignity! Would ours not have been a veritably historical greatness had we been privileged to serve Christ as the Baptist served Him? But the priests have both an official and a personal relation to the Savior that is not merely different from, but much

higher than, that of the Baptist. John had only to prepare the way for Christ, but not to do the work of Christ; priests are for the Christian people like Christ continuing His work. The Savior, to whom John only pointed with his finger, speaks by their mouth, works through their hands, His power resides in them. They carry not the sandals of the Lord, nor merely loosen the latchet of His shoe, but they carry Christ Himself in their hands and the Eucharistic Savior is entrusted to their loving care.

It is true that there has been only one John the Baptist, whilst there are many priests at all times and in all countries. But as Christ does not lose a particle of His dignity although in His love for men He multiplies His gracious presence a million times, even so the official and personal relation of each individual priest to the Savior is no less exalted and sublime than it would be were there only one priest on this earth instead of three hundred thousand. Is it, therefore, not proper for each priest to be like the Baptist, pure and holy, humble and self-sacrificing, zealous and whole-souled? Can we, considering all this, do anything better than often thank God for having called us, and right now say a "Te Deum" in thanksgiving for the privilege we have received? And after this, let us offer ourselves with all we are and all we possess to the service of the Eucharistic Lord and ask the Baptist to give us a little of his spirit.

And even the religious who is not in Holy Orders, has an official and personal relation to Christ not vouchsafed to the Baptist. John had merely to point to Christ, he could not speak about the great love and the touching example and all the wonderful works of His love. But the religious do all this in virtue of their vocation in the

school-room, at the sickbed and in the institutions of Christian charity. This is their official relation, to continue the work of Christ.

And their personal relation, how wonderful it is! Theologians have proposed the question why the Lord has not instituted a special sacrament for the religious state, as He has done for the sacerdotal and matrimonial state. Their answer is that Holy Communion, though intended for all Christians, in a very special manner is the sacrament of the religious state. It would lead too far here to give the reasons by which they prove their statement. They are taken from that close and more personal relation which is established with Christ through the religious vows.

In Holy Communion we carry more than the sandals of Christ. Now Holy Communion is the principal act of worship and preparation before and thanksgiving after it the most essential prayer of the religious; it is the greatest work of their day. Therefore let them take care that it is also the best work of the whole day.

II. THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY GHOST AND FIRE. "I indeed baptize you in water unto penance, but he that shall come after me . . . shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire."

John administers the baptism of penance in order to create in the people the disposition of mind with which they are to expect the coming of the Messias. But his is a baptism of water, which possesses only the power which lies in an impressive sign, above all when this

ceremony is performed on many assembled together for the same purpose, and the example of others increases the impression. It is to rouse and confirm the proper sentiments; but the spiritual effect proceeds not from the rite, but from the inner sentiments.

Christ is to work in an entirely different manner. His baptism is not a mere symbol, but has power, for He baptizes "in the Holy Ghost and fire." John baptizes "in water"; he merely submerges the body in the river; his rite has no effect on the soul. Christ will baptize "in the Holy Ghost," he will submerge the entire man, body and soul, in a new, vivifying, supernatural element. The Holy Ghost will penetrate the interior man and give him new vitality. Christ will baptize "in fire." Fire to the mind of the people of those days is the most powerful element, much more powerful than water. The Holy Ghost will appear in the shape of tongues of fire. Again, the threats of the Baptist against the impenitent are indeed like the roar of thunder; but after all, they are mere threats, whilst a curse from the mouth of Christ is in itself efficacious and works like a consuming fire. Finally, John's baptism is a mere ceremony, whereas Christ's baptism is a Sacrament of the New Law.

John the Baptist belongs to the Old Testament. His vocation as the forerunner of Christ for many reasons does not permit him to become a disciple of the Lord, and he must die before the New Testament has been instituted. His work, therefore, has all the weakness

of the Old Testament, which St. Paul sums up in these words: "By the work of the (old) law no flesh (man) shall be justified" (Gal. 2,16).

*Applications.* 1) St. Paul in more than one of his epistles impresses the neophytes with this truth that in our Sacraments the Holy Ghost is working. This is a truth we ought to remember when we administer or receive a Sacrament: "God now is working in or through me." God is exercising His omnipotence and His kindness in or through me. How full of reverence will it make us in the administration and the reception of the Sacraments. Are we always conscious of this truth? Do we pray before the administration of a Sacrament? Do we always thank God properly after the reception of a Sacrament? Never is God so near to us on earth as at the moment of a sacramental action. The work done at that moment is strictly supernatural, and is consequently greater than the miraculous cure of a disease or the multiplying of loaves or even the resurrection of a dead person.

2) The work of Christ in the Sacraments is yet in another sense done "in the Holy Ghost and fire." They work "exopere operato," in virtue of their own inherent power. We can hardly realize the blessing this means. How much doubt and anxiety would torment us if the personal character and the devotion of the priest at the given moment were the cause of the great work, or if the entire efficacy and not merely the larger or smaller amount of grace, depended on the work of the recipient. What difference is there, for instance, in the security we have of the pardon of our sins in the Sacrament of Penance and that which

is obtained by an act of perfect contrition! Or again have we the same certitude for obtaining graces when we say a devout prayer as when we receive a Sacrament? Let us be grateful to God for having called us into the New Testament, into the Church of Christ and unto a participation in the Sacraments of the New Law.

III. THE CLEANSING OF THE FLOOR. "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his floor: and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

John announces that immediately after him will appear the Mightier One who "baptizes in the Holy Ghost and fire." He comes like the husbandman at the time of the harvest. The seed was sown centuries ago at the time of Abraham and the patriarchs, and for this reason ought to have grown for centuries and now be ripe for the harvest. The Messias will garner the harvest. He wants to find faithful Israelites who are fit to be received into the Kingdom of God that is to begin now. And yet, how much of all that lies on the threshing floor is worthless chaff, which this husbandman can never use! As the threshed grain is winnowed, so the Messias will winnow His people. The nation will be stirred by Him down to its deepest depth and put to the test. Whatever is carried away by the blast of His doctrine and the treatment that awaits those who follow Him, will be swept together and burned.

*Applications.* 1) God's visitations at all times effect a separation and a segregation. For at such times He offers

special graces, but He also makes special demands which always amount to a sacrifice of self. This is true first of all when God's visitation concerns the world or the Church or a particular country. God winnows and separates the chaff from the wheat. Persons not imbued with the proper spirit drop off and go to ruin. They cannot stand the brunt of persecution or they cannot make the sacrifices required to keep the faith or to save their conscience or to remain firm and steadfast in their vocation. Great public calamities and periods of political, social, religious or spiritual upheaval and commotion make the good better, but the indifferent and the wicked worse. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that all who are in any way entrusted with the welfare of souls, whether young or old, all who in any shape or form come into contact with the world and have power to influence it, be themselves deeply rooted in the spirit of faith, entertain a serious view of life and eternity, have the proper valuation of things eternal and of things temporal. Above all should they have the spirit of faith and try to imbue their charges with the same spirit, the same views, the same ideas. We dare not follow the line of least resistance, this woeful policy of modern education, and, alas, at times too of the direction of souls. We must not make things too easy nor work so much with merely temporal motives and secular and natural considerations, neither in our own spiritual life nor in the education and direction of others. God's service must hurt at times; otherwise people cannot have a proper realization of Heaven. Christ wants only those who are strong enough to carry the cross. There is too much naturalism in much of our educational and even in some of our modern ascetical literature.

2) Chaff grows with the wheat not only in the field of nations and societies, but in every human heart. As long as we live in this sinful world everything human is afflicted with the blight of poor human nature. But the greater the grace offered to us, the more perfectly does God want to reign in our heart and the less of the purely human and earthly interest must remain in us. The chaff must be separated from the wheat and burned. The grace of the priesthood and the religious vocation are among the greatest favors bestowed by God on man, and for this reason the sacrifices demanded of the members of these states are among the greatest and hardest. If they refuse to make them, God's grace is rejected for what is merely human and temporal. The chaff increases in the soul and finally there is not a grain of wheat, but only chaff growing in it. The Master of the threshing floor will not tarry long; and when He comes, He will cleanse the floor thoroughly and burn all the chaff. May we not be mere chaff as so many Israelites were when the Savior began to preach!

COLLOQUY. Thanksgiving for the graces of our vocation to the true faith and to the state to which we belong. Sorrow for the poor use we have made of the graces received in our vocation. Oblation of self to God's service and for the crosses He sees fit to send us. Prayer for a great and practical esteem of God's graces, above all of our vocation, for a holy reverence for all that is God's and for the spirit of sacrifice in His service. "The Lord hath reigned, let the people be angry; he that sitteth on the cherubims: let the

earth be moved. The Lord is great in Sion, and high above all people. Let them give praise to thy great name: for it is terrible and holy: and the king's honor loveth judgment," (Ps. 98,1–3).

## Meditation 18

### CHRIST'S BAPTISM (Matt. 3,13–15)

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan, unto John, to be baptized by him. But John stayed him, saying: I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said to him: Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfill all justice. Then he suffered him."

The last preparation has been made. Now the Messias, who for a long time has remained unknown in Galilee, can manifest Himself to the people and begin His work. As the Baptist according to God's will has prepared the way for our Lord, the latter wants to be introduced solemnly by him into His Messianic career. He too asks to be baptized. Everybody can understand why John objects to this; but Jesus insists on it as a divine command, and steps into the river to let Himself be immersed by John. With what reverence do the angels witness this scene. Like the multitudes of sinful men, who in the consciousness of their guilt demand the baptism of penance, Christ takes upon Himself the confession of sin, not indeed of personal guilt, but the profession of being liable for the sins of men. As He disappears under the water

to signify the annihilation of the sinful in man, so He will be immersed after three years in the waters of suffering in order to wash man's soul with His own blood. After this baptism Jesus publicly begins to walk the road of the Redeemer, the road to the cross.

Let us ask the Savior to give us a share in the sentiments that animated Him at His baptism.

I. JESUS DEMANDS TO BE BAPTIZED. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan, unto John, to be baptized by him."

The days of the peaceful life in Nazareth are over for Christ. By God's command He leaves His mother and His home and goes to the Jordan, not like the rest who, after receiving the baptism of penance, return home to their customary occupations. For Him the hour of separation and the time for beginning the work of His vocation has come. That vocation will henceforth demand all His time and energy and draw Him away from all worldly work and from living with His family.

Until coming to the Jordan Christ has been an ordinary Israelite in external appearance, but from the moment of baptism He is also externally segregated from the people and a divine messenger. That baptism is the visible consecration to His vocation. Interiorly He has been consecrated to it at the first moment of His human existence, but the external and visible introduction He is to receive now from John. That

God-sent precursor, known to all the people as a prophet, in reality the last of the prophets, must attest, endorse and verify the mission and character of the unknown man before the people. This is the climax of the mission and work of the forerunner. From now on the Lord stands before Israel as the legitimately proven Messias foretold and prepared for by all prophets and institutions of the Old Law. He is the fulfilment of the whole law. "The end of the law is Christ," says St. Paul (Rom. 10,4).

That Our Lord begins His career and work as Redeemer with His baptism we are taught also by St. Peter. He tells the disciples assembled in the upper room in Jerusalem in preparation for the coming of the Holy Ghost and about to elect a successor to Judas Iscariot: "Of these men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day wherein he was taken up from among us, one of these must be made a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1,21.22).

But this baptism is not only a legitimation of Christ as the Messias, it is also a consecration to the cross, not only to the wooden cross on which He is to die, but to "the standard of the cross," as St. Ignatius calls it in the "Spiritual Exercises," which consists of the spirit of detachment from all earthly things and the love of humiliation. For in this baptism He becomes the sinner by proxy and takes all the sins of mankind upon Himself. He has to atone for them, and conduct

the world out of sin and on the way that leads to Heaven. Therefore, He has to give up His home, nay, His own mother; He must live with strangers and deal with a people that is unwilling to understand His doctrines and has no aptitude for what surpasses earth and the senses. From now on He is to confer the greatest spiritual and corporal benefits, heal the sick, cast out devils, raise the dead to life, feed the hungry, while receiving very little gratitude and less understanding. His whole life will be a failure. He will have to sow where others will reap. He is to meet so much contradiction, be so often falsely accused, be hunted down like a criminal and finally be executed on the worst charges that religious and civil laws know.

*Applications.* 1) The priest is ordained for his vocation by sacraments and holy sacramentals; the religious is consecrated by the blessings of the Church, the reception of the habit and the religious profession. These are their baptisms. They are consecrations to a life of detachment and humiliation, not to a life of honor and comfort. The priestly garb and the religious habit are in marked contrast to the fashions of the world. They are a faint expression of the contrast that must exist between their lives and the life of the laity and of the world.

Let us strengthen in our souls the conviction that we have been consecrated not merely by our generous resolve, but by God through the intervention of the Church to a life of detachment and humiliation, to the cross of Christ. Our life may not be comfortable, it must be in a way without comfort. It can not be anything else to nature if we

are true to our vocation. And if God does not send us crosses, we must seek them in voluntary mortifications, in the observance of the daily order, in the faithful performance of our ministry or office, in the spirit of prayer and recollection, in abstaining from worldly pleasures. It must be uncomfortable to nature and our passions. It must and will be pleasant in the supernatural consolations of God and the peace of soul. Let us examine ourselves whether it really is such. Let us thank God again for our vocation and renew our oblation.

2) However, let us not omit to fix our gaze on the Savior and note the great love He shows in this mystery towards mankind in general and towards us in particular. He is truly ready to give up and sacrifice everything for us, even His Blessed Mother. He is wholly ours. When He directs His steps to the Jordan after taking leave of His Mother, He really thinks of every one of us and rejoices that He can make this sacrifice for us. Let us make acts of love towards Him and acts of greatest confidence in His kindness and affection for us.

Nor can we fail to notice the great humility that lies in this act. He publicly confesses Himself a sinner, the representative and proxy of wicked persons. This public confession of being laden with sins is very humiliating. It will be used against Him by the disciples of the Baptist who refuse to follow Him and prefer to remain with their first master. They will tell John in tones of indignation: "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou gavest testimony, behold he baptizeth, and all men come to him" (John 3,26).

It is a humiliation also in this that Christ has to submit

to one who in dignity and sanctity is so far below Him. Christ is the source of all grace and all holiness. All that John possesses in supernatural grace comes from Him. But here again, there is no false humility nor exaggeration. John as Baptist is the representative of the Heavenly Father to whom Christ as man is subject and from whom He receives all graces. And graces Jesus certainly needs for the heroic task placed on His shoulders. Thus the Baptist really is for Him the mediator of divine help, and as such the Lord approaches him with deep reverence. What a flood of light does all this throw on the character of Christ and on the doctrine of faith that He has been made like us in everything, sin only excepted. Instances like this make us realize that He truly is the most amiable among the children of men.

3) He instructs us here concerning the disposition of mind with which we are to approach God's representatives, be they the ministers of the Sacraments or spiritual directors or superiors. He teaches us with what submission and humility and with what desire we are to receive through them graces from God. Superiors and spiritual directors are for us not only the exponents of the divine will, but when they make that will known to us they are the mediators of the grace which we need to fulfill the will of God.

II. THE BAPTIST'S REFUSAL. "But John stayed him, saying: I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?"

John recognizes the Savior. It is the first time they meet, though related to each other. The external sign,

namely the visible descent of the Holy Ghost and the voice of the Father, is given only after the baptism. But God opens the eyes of John's soul so that he may not blindly and unknowingly perform the highest function of his mission. Realizing the dignity of Him who requests baptism, he can not but make objections. What he says is perfectly true: "I ought to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?" If we consider only John and Jesus as individuals, we can not see what the precursor can give to the Savior by his baptism.

But the Savior and the Baptist are at the Jordan not for their own sakes exclusively. The people to whom both are sent, know the forerunner very well, but are wholly unacquainted with Jesus. They are to learn His true character and His mission from John. It is true, Jesus could introduce Himself, and not only John, but Heaven itself gives Him His credentials immediately after the baptism and repeatedly afterwards by signs and miracles. But according to God's decree there is not to be an abrupt break between the Old and the New Testament. The Old Covenant is to pass over into the New by an organic connection made by John and his baptism.

*Applications.* 1) The power which the Son of God has given men over Himself is truly terrifying. He was Himself baptized by John. But in a much more complete manner does He grant every priest control over His work, His power and His person. Any one who knows and believes what Christ is, what His work, what His power,

must tremble and shudder at the exalted character of the priesthood and the priestly functions. Who then could dare to intrude himself unbidden and uncalled? "Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was" (Heb. 5, 4). Only in the name of God and at Christ's word may and ought man to present himself for the office and dignity denied to angels. In spite of his lowliness and unworthiness, of which he must always remain conscious, he is appointed mediator between God and men. The sacerdotal dignity and power is given no one for his own sake. The priest never is and never can be, more than an instrument in God's hand for the glory of the Divine Majesty and the salvation of mankind. He is priest for others. In calling men to the priesthood God intends to save men through the instrumentality of men. And he who is called, must be able to say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2, 20). In his whole life the priest must be another Christ.

All religious, too, can repeat the words of St. John; for they must find for Christ a dwelling-place in the souls of those entrusted to their care, and all must work for the sanctification of others. Christ is anxious to live and work in those souls, but He makes Himself dependent on the efforts of poor human beings and condescends to become their debtor. Might they not say that they are feeble enough, unworthy enough for working only at their own salvation? Could the Lord not find better persons for so noble a task? But as He has deigned to choose them, let them also try to live so that they can say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." Then they will be able to say: "I work for souls, now not I,

but Christ worketh in and through me." We live so that Christ liveth and worketh in us when we do not seek our temporal advantage, but have a good intention in all things; when we faithfully observe the rules and regulations given us even when it is not so very agreeable; when we combine our work with frequent aspirations and devote our best efforts to prayer.

III. CHRIST'S ANSWER. "And Jesus answering, said to him: Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfill all justice."

In modern English we may express the idea thus: "Do not make any objection, but let us both do now what God wants of us. It is but right that we both comply with the will of God." God's decree is decisive in everything for the Savior, but more than ever where it is a question of establishing the Kingdom of God. God has decreed that Christ is to be baptized by John. This baptism is not to be a mere external ceremony without an interior meaning. The Father wants Him to acknowledge publicly the need of atonement for sin, not indeed for personal faults, which the Savior has not committed, but for the sins of the world, which God has placed on Him. He is to declare Himself ready in public to be annihilated that others may be cleansed and live. He offers Himself as a victim for mankind; His offer is accepted and He is publicly proclaimed King of the new Kingdom of God. Since Christ is the representative of the sinful world, the "sinner by proxy" or the "proxy of sinners," it is right

that He suffers and that He willingly accepts the sentence of divine justice against Him.

*Applications.* 1) We have a twofold reason to repeat the words of Christ: "It becometh us to fulfill all justice," or to lead a life of penance and sacrifice. First because of our own sins and faults, for which we have to offer satisfaction to the divine justice; secondly, because of the sins of others, since we as priests are mediators between men and God as well as between God and men, and as religious we are burdened by the Church with a part of the atonement which she has to render for the sins of her children; and if souls are entrusted to our charge, we have an additional reason for doing penance in their stead.

This atonement consists not only of austerities and mortifications but of laboring with all the greater energy at our own sanctification. For the principle of solidarity holds good in this world also in God's reckoning. The Lord is merciful to the world for the sake of the ten just on account of whom he would have saved even such wicked cities as Sodom and Gomorrha. History proves this very clearly. As long as there are saints found in a nation, God shows it mercy.

Besides, when we offer Christ on the altar or assist at the Holy Sacrifice, let us frequently offer ourselves, our persons, our faculties, our whole being to God and carry this oblation out by serious efforts at our own sanctification and by generous work for the salvation of souls in accordance with our vocation.

2) Our Lord here again, as always in His entire mortal life, is what we may call "a brother of the common life."

He never makes an exception, He never keeps away from the common exercises of piety and devotion. "Like us in everything, sin only excepted," He follows all the good observances and pious exercises of His people. And yet, if any one, He could with good reason dispense Himself from many of the Jewish customs and exercises. But there is one great reason forbidding this, and that reason is the will of the Father, Who wishes and commands Him to be like the rest and make no exception, not even when it is a question of paying the tax for the temple, which according to the intentions of its builders and the general conception of Israel is the house of the Messias, and only rented, so to speak, to the nation. "It becometh us to fulfill all justice," must be our motto too.

IV. THE BAPTISM. "Then he (John) suffered him." With this short expression the evangelist reports an event that is of greatest importance. It would seem that when Jesus approaches and makes ready to take off His outer garments,. St. John stops Him by raising his hand. Now after the answer of Christ he lets Him do as He wants. Christ steps into the river, folds His hands or crosses His arms with simple modesty and is submerged by His precursor. No penitent can behave with greater humility and yet more naturally than the Savior. According to many commentators the persons after having been submerged remained in the water and confessed their sins. This the Lord could not do, but "forthwith came out of the water," as the evangelist says in the next verse.

What are the sentiments of the Baptist, as in all

humility and with trembling hand he performs his part of the rite? How insignificant does he feel in the presence of the Son of God. How his heart glows with love for the Word Incarnate. What an amount of new grace flows into his soul. It is the first time they meet. He had entertained a lofty idea of the Savior, but he had not expected so much humility; such condescension is more than he could envisage. At the same time he cannot but realize that in this act of Christ he receives a divine confirmation of his mission and he is grateful for it.

What are the sentiments of the angels witnessing this scene? Do they perhaps think of the trial they had to undergo before they were admitted to the beatific vision? Is it hard for them now to acknowledge the God-Man as their Master and to submit to Him? They know, moreover, the full significance of this act and admire the wonderful submission with which their Lord bows to the will of the Father. May we not ask them to let us have a little share in their knowledge and their love of Christ?

What are the sentiments of Christ Himself? Love of the Father, complete submission to His will, love for men and desire for their salvation. He realizes that as man He is God's creature and, therefore, totally subject to God, obliged to fulfill His will. He sees the justice and love with which the Father makes Him, though innocent, the victim for the sins of His brethren, and without any demur obeys the command.

*Applications.* 1) Christ offers Himself for us, becoming

obedient to the will of the Father in everything, even unto death. He fully understands what rights the Father has over Him as a creature, and not only with resignation, but with joy does He accept the commands of God. He loves the Father and He sees better than anybody else how His happiness consists in doing the will of God. God has the same rights over us, and our happiness too consists in doing the divine will. God in imposing His commands on us is led by the same justice and love as in demanding the obedience of His only Son. Let us try to understand this better, and let us often renew our oblation and our submission to God. Such acts frequently repeated go far in producing in us the sentiments of true submission which we owe the Divine Majesty.

2) St. John, despite his humility, is ready to baptize Christ, though naturally speaking, it is not easy for him. He is not like St. Peter, who will refuse to permit the Lord to wash his feet until he is told to do so under pain of having no part in Him. Who is the more perfect of the two? Who is more submissive to God? The Baptist accepts the great honor conferred on him; but this does not puff him up, because he fully realizes that it is not due to his personal character or merits. This is the disposition in which we are to accept honors or higher positions when, through the proper authority, God confers them on us. On the other hand we are not to attribute them to our personal merits and use them for our personal advantage or reputation. There is no position or work in the Church of God in which it is right for us to intend making a great name for ourselves. We should do the best that lies in our power, but banish every temptation to vanity and self-glorification.

COLLOQUY. Acts of love and gratitude towards Christ. Prayer for the spirit of detachment from the world and all creatures, and of humility and sacrifice. "O Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Thy favor and help, in the presence of Thine infinite goodness, and in the sight of Thy glorious Mother, and of all the Saints of the heavenly court, protesting that I wish and desire, and that it is my deliberate determination, provided only it be to Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all insults and reproaches, and all poverty." (St. Ignatius).

## Meditation 19

### CHRIST REVEALED (Matt. 3,16.17)

"And Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened to him: and he saw the spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him. And behold a voice from heaven, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus by receiving John's baptism had solemnly declared his willingness to undertake the Messianic work. He had scarcely stepped out of the water, when Heaven spoke and declared that He who until now had appeared only as a poor carpenter, was in reality the very man through whom God wanted to carry out His plan of redemption and to establish His Kingdom among mankind. For these reasons the Holy Ghost descended on Him in a visible form, and for this reason the Father declared Him His beloved Son, whose offer was pleasing to Him.

The sun of a new day now breaks through the clouds upon Israel and the world. Heaven's brightness shines upon earth's darkness. The Spirit, who in the beginning of creation hovered over chaos organizing and quickening, descends upon this new creation, and God, who so far has been an angry judge on account of men's sins,

beholds once more in one man a beloved Son, who will lead also the lost sons back to this Father.

Let us ask for the grace of properly understanding what has been given us in Christ; of looking upon Him in our thoughts and actions as the One whom Heaven itself has revealed to us. For if we really have found Christ, we shall also find in Him the Spirit which from sinners makes us just and children of God; and we shall find the Father, who can be pleased with us; and we shall find Heaven, our home, which Christ has opened for us and to which He will take us.

I. "THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED TO HIM," i. e. on account of Him (not merely for His benefit and so that He alone saw the phenomenon). Above Him an opening, a rift appeared in the sky, either in the blue firmament or in the clouds, possibly also a sheen issued from above, out of which the dove appeared and the voice of the Father came.

The entire apparition after Christ's baptism is a revelation of a symbolic nature. By means of external signs truths referring to the invisible world are made known. The first of these signs is the opening of the heavens. It signifies the new relation which Christ establishes between Heaven and earth. Heaven has been closed to mankind ever since Adam fell. Not only has it been impossible for man to enter it, but he has also not received any communication from Heaven except what little he heard in the primary revelation

given to Adam after his fall, the occasional intimations vouchsafed to the patriarchs before the election of Abraham and to Israel through the patriarchs and prophets. But even these communications were only anticipated effects of Christ's work. Now, however, since the Kingdom of God is to be founded on earth in Christ's baptism, Heaven again begins to rule and influence mankind regularly and habitually; the road to it is again open to us, and it becomes once more the home of the Father from whom men have been estranged. As before sin God and man in Paradise conversed with each other on terms of familiarity, so hereafter the old friendship and intimacy will exist owing to Christ's work. Heaven and earth now and as long as this life lasts will be connected by an invisible, but no less real intimacy for the wanderer on earth. The complete restoration of the first creation will occur too, though only in the future, on the day of the general resurrection. A beginning is made by the Savior entering upon His public career. Therefore, the heavens are opened immediately at the solemn commencement of His activity as Redeemer. Hence the meaning of this spectacle is: The road to Heaven is open again and God and the happy denizens of that realm of bliss are again on terms of familiar intercourse with man.

*Applications.* 1) Through Christ, as we said, the road to Heaven is opened to us all. We know the meaning of the words of St. Peter: "Neither is there salvation in any

other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4, 12). Do we thank Him for this, not only in words, but in deeds and in our manner of life? Our whole existence here on earth with all its troubles has received a real meaning only through Christ. Man indeed by his nature is destined for an eternal happiness. But what does this internal destination avail if through his own fault he can not attain it? By baptism Christ enters upon His office as Redeemer in order that our guilt may be forgiven and that we may be able, through the guidance and strength He gives us, to walk this road with comparative ease.

Heaven certainly is worth every sacrifice that this guidance by Christ entails. Therefore let us renew the firm resolution of obtaining Heaven at any cost.

2) Terms of familiarity have been established again between God and us by Christ. What does this mean for us? Faber explains it very aptly in his "Growth in Holiness" Chapter V.: "A man may be religious in a certain sense: he may fear God, hate sin, be strictly conscientious and honestly desire to save his soul. All these are most excellent things. But you can not say that the Saints were men of this sort. They had about them a sweetness, a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, which gave quite a character to their devotion. By tenderness is not meant a mere impressionableness, a soft-heartedness or a facility of tears. . . . True tenderness begins in various ways. Its progress is marked by sorrow for sin, without thinking of its punishments, by what I have elsewhere called a touchiness about the interests of Jesus, by childlike docility to our superiors and spiritual directors, by mortifying our-

selves and not feeling it a yoke, by never thinking of stopping short at precepts without going on to counsels, and by an incipient appetite for humiliations." God no longer is merely the supreme Lord and the Judge, but the Father. And as children living on terms of intimacy with father and mother do not think of reward and punishment when they try to do what is pleasing to their parents nor count the difficulties and sacrifices, so we feel near to God, are drawn to Him with affectionate love and make light of all the sacrifices we make for Him, being intent solely on pleasing and loving Him.

II. THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST. "And he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him."

From the heavens on high a dove is seen coming down and resting on the head of the Savior, as St. Jerome says. It is seen not only by Christ, but by St. John and all present. The Baptist himself says later on: "I saw the spirit coming down as a dove from heaven, and he remained upon him" (John 1,32).

St. Luke tells us: "Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also being baptized and praying, heaven was opened: and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, as a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven: Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased" (Luke, 3,21.22).

Consequently, though St. Matthew says only that Christ saw the dove, the majority of commentators explain the passage by saying that what Christ saw, was witnessed also by those present. And this stands to

reason. For the heavenly manifestations here mentioned were useless for Christ Himself, since in the beatific vision, which He constantly enjoyed, He saw the work the Holy Ghost was doing in Him directly as it was. Here in the apparition of the dove He had only an imperfect symbol which could but hint from afar at what He saw so clearly. Nor was it of much profit for St. John alone, because by a direct revelation he knew much more about the person, dignity, office and work of Christ than this symbol could tell him. But for the people this manifestation was all-important; for they so far had only the word of the Baptist, who though a prophet, after all was merely a human being. Here God Himself spoke to them and very appropriately confirmed and enlarged the testimony of St. John. St. Jerome gives another reason why the people saw the dove descending upon Christ and resting on His head. Had this not taken place, the words of the Father: "This is my beloved Son" might have been applicable to St. John as well as to the Savior. The appearance of the dove shows them that the voice speaks of Christ.

Let us, therefore, in spirit be present at this wonderful revelation. Christ has ascended from the water and stands on the bank, wrapt in prayer. Heaven opens over Him, a sheen of light comes down and encircles Him, and a dove gently glides down from the firmament and settles upon His head.

This opening of the heavens and the apparition of the dove bear a symbolic character. The celestial man-

sions are open for Him and the Holy Ghost visibly descends upon Him only in as far as He is the representative of God for men and the mediator of men with God. Everything designates the graces which begin to come down on the world through the work which He inaugurates with His baptism. Heaven is not being opened for Him personally today: it has been open to Him since the moment of His Incarnation, because it is His birthright as the Son of God. Nor does the Holy Ghost descend with His gifts upon Him as man only at this moment; for even in His human nature, He has possessed the plenitude of the Divine Spirit from the moment that His soul was created. For Him there begins today only that public and open direction which His human nature needs in His work of salvation.

But the heavens begin to be opened for Israel and mankind now that Christ publicly enters upon His career and the wonderful gifts of the Holy Ghost begin to be distributed to the world. The first recipients are the Baptist and the people present at the Jordan. But soon Christ will offer them to all Israel and after His Ascension they will become the property of the whole world.

In the beginning of time the Spirit of God hovered over the waters like a dove and formed the shapeless chaos into the wonderful world we now behold; at Christ's baptism He hovers over the supernatural chaos that has involved mankind and through Christ begins to form out of it a new world, more wonderful than the first creation, the Kingdom of God. His great

activity will become more manifest with His second appearance on the first Christian Pentecost. It is seen in the holiness of the Church and her members, in the wonderful direction, propagation and protection manifested in her history and the wonderful development of the interior and supernatural life which can be found only in the Church of Christ. And all this activity of the Holy Ghost will be continued until the end of time.

He manifests Himself in the form of a dove, that bird of peace which returned to Noah carrying a sprouting olive twig symbolizing the reconciliation of God with mankind. But the reconciliation that begins to be effected at Christ's baptism, is much more gracious and wonderful than that which was effected after the deluge. Then God promised not to destroy the physical life of mankind again by the waters of His wrath, which came out of the earth and the clouds. Now He promises that those who follow Christ will not die "the second death" in the fires of hell, but live an eternal supernatural life.

Thus the apparition of the Holy Ghost at Christ's baptism is a symbol of the blessings Christ brings down from Heaven.

*Applications.* 1) The same Spirit that is seen descending on Christ at the Jordan came down on us and took His habitation in our soul at baptism and when, after mortal sin, we were reconciled to God. We are really temples of the Holy Ghost, who by an especial presence lives and works in us. We have Him as our own through sanctify-

ing grace and we have Him working in us by every actual grace we receive. How should we prize all this were it done not only invisibly, but with an accompanying visible sign! What good use should we make of every inspiration and every other grace granted to us all day long! We receive so many of them every day as priests and as religious, but since they are invisible, we often make too little of them. And yet, in themselves they have the same importance as the manifestation at the Jordan. Let us try to make a better use of them.

2) All who belong to the ecclesiastical state as priests or as religious, have received the Holy Ghost in an especial manner. Their ordination and their profession are for them what baptism was for Christ. They must, therefore, be "full of the Holy Ghost," as was said of the original representatives of this state, the apostles and first deacons. Through them, through their words and examples the Holy Ghost is to speak, instruct, console, give life to others. But they must first themselves listen to His voice, suffer themselves to be guided by Him and become truly spiritual. In their souls they ought to foster a much greater life than that which men see, a truly interior life in the Spirit of the God. Christ gives us the germ of this life, but we must carefully foster it. Let us take heed lest we "grieve the holy spirit of God whereby we are sealed" (Eph. 4,30), and still more, lest we "extinguish the spirit" (Heb. 5,19). For this it is necessary that we lead a more recollected life, commune with God by means of aspirations and by a proper distribution of our obligatory prayers over the entire day not leaving them all for the evening to be rushed through without much devotion; and

finally, we must faithfully comply with the inspirations given us.

III. THE VOICE OF THE FATHER. "And behold a voice from heaven saying: This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

Man as a rule understands words better than signs. Therefore, the voice of the Father is heard and nobody can doubt about whom He speaks. It is the simple, humble, modest man standing on the bank of the Jordan wrapt in devout prayer. He is renewing the oblation of His person, His work, His sufferings, His life for the great task that has been laid on Him and which He accepted by baptism in the presence of witnesses. He has humbled Himself by taking His place among sinners and thus hiding His dignity and holiness. Now the Father exalts Him. The words of the Greek text are more emphatic and distinct than our version gives them.

He says: "This is my Son, my beloved." It is customary in the Old Testament to call the only son "my son, my beloved." Therefore the divinity of Christ is here solemnly proclaimed by the Father, "of whom the Israelites say that He is their God."

And He adds: "In whom I am well pleased." Before Christ came into this world, there was little on earth that could please the Father, and even that little was due to Christ. It was owing to the foreseen merits of the Savior, and almost without exception it had a distinct reference to Him or was done in preparation

for His coming. Abraham was a friend of God, David, the man according to God's heart; but both were such through Christ. Even in so many of them there was much that was sinful and displeasing to the Lord. Christ is the first man, as Mary is the first woman, in whom there has never been any stain and on whom the divine pleasure rested all the time. Thus the union with God made at the creation of the first man, but basely destroyed by sin, is restored again and more magnificently, by "His Son, His beloved," who while the only Son by nature, will give to God many by adoption. He will free men by His Messianic work so that they too may become the beloved sons in whom the Father is well pleased.

Many theologians think that Christ by His baptism instituted the Sacrament of Baptism and that the sonship which becomes ours through this Sacrament, has implicitly been proclaimed by the Father in these words.

Simultaneously, here for the first time the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is revealed to the world at large. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost manifest themselves to the people at the Jordan. Thus by the intimacy which Christ here begins to establish between God and man, is vouchsafed to mankind that intimate knowledge of God's inner nature, which even the highest created spirit cannot attain by its natural powers, but which begins by faith in the divine revelation and is brought to perfection in the beatific vision.

*Applications.* 1) Modern rationalism denies the great

doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ, which in reality are the greatest treasures of the human mind and the human heart. They are in themselves the deepest and most important truths, as they are the greatest mysteries. If it is important for anyone to know not only the names of his parents, but their qualities and character, their history, and above all to be no stranger to them, it certainly is infinitely more important for us to know the Triune God Who has been, still is, and will be more to us than our father and mother. And at the same time to know these mysteries is a great honor in as much as God grants us a knowledge which in itself is absolutely beyond the reach of any creature left to its natural powers. Not even the Cherubim and Seraphim, the most perfect of all beings created by God, can attain it with their superlatively acute minds.

Let us, therefore, make acts of faith, hope, love and adoration, and offer them to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

2) The Father is "well pleased" because Christ as man performs the most perfect act of submission to the divine will. It is not pride, nor stern and cold justice on the part of God that is satisfied by this heroic act of the Savior, but the divine holiness, that wonderful attribute of God, by which He must love and will what is right and good, and hate what is evil and sinful. As that holiness, that feeling and willing what is good, if we may say so, is offended by sin, so it is pleased by what is virtue. Yea, God is delighted, takes pleasure, rejoices in every good act performed by His creatures. And with this holiness is coupled the most paternal love for them.

Let us use an illustration. Good and pious parents certainly are delighted if their child is successful in school but this pleasure is very much less than the delight they experience when they notice how the child of his own accord performs a very virtuous action. Both their parental love and their love of virtue is pleased. Akin, in a way, is the pleasure God experiences now that Christ as man performs that heroic act of submission to the divine will. God takes a similar delight in the good actions we perform. Do we realize this as we ought? The lively conviction of this truth has much to do with that "tenderness" of which we spoke in the first part of this meditation.

3). By Baptism we have been born again as children of God. May He be well pleased in us as He is well pleased in Christ. The pleasure in Christ of which He speaks at the Jordan, refers not only to Jesus alone as individual person, but to the work of redemption He takes upon Himself. Our vocation renders us similar to Christ also in this that we carry on His work of making men children of God. For this reason the divine pleasure rests on us in an especial manner. This must be a new motive for not only carefully preserving the divine sonship in our souls and for living like good children of the Heavenly Father, but for zealously performing the work of our vocation to the end that He be pleased in many children.

COLLOQUY. Thanksgiving for all the graces we receive through Christ, above all the graces of our vocation. Oblation of ourselves for the work of our calling and state. Prayer for grace to be faithful children and to work zealously for the salvation of souls. "What shall

I render the Lord for all the things he hath rendered to me? I will take the chalice of salvation; and I will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows before all his people" (Ps. 115,12–14).

## Meditation 20

### THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT (Matt. 4,1).

"Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil."

In the revelation that followed the Baptism, the Holy Ghost descended upon Jesus in a visible form. By it Christ once for all received the divine credentials for His Messianic dignity and work. Then it was over. Only the invisible Spirit remained with Him and undertook the direction of the Man Christ during His life and work as Messias. He first led Him into the desert. Here another spirit was to try to obtrude himself as guide: the evil spirit, the prince of this world.

The splendor of the heavenly apparition disappeared quickly and under an impulse from above the Messias, proclaimed the Son of God, directed His steps into the desert to pray and fast. No heavenly rays surrounded Him; He remained in the desert a poor man, lost and alone.

We find it very hard to represent to ourselves the glory of the Kingdom of God without external splendor. But this is not the way which the Spirit of God leads.

Man must walk God's ways battling with the spirit of the world.

Let us ask for the grace whilst contemplating the first steps of the divinely proclaimed Redeemer, of imbuing ourselves with the conviction that the way God leads us is not that of glory and comfort, but one of struggle; and let us make the firm resolution to place the direction of our lives not in the hands of the evil spirit, but in those of the spirit of God.

1. "JESUS WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT." Christ as God is in nature actually one with the Holy Ghost, but as man He needs the divine guidance. The works of sanctification, though proceeding from the Triune God by one common action, are attributed especially to the Holy Ghost. With the baptism and revelation of Christ the first direct step is taken for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, which is "appropriated," as theologians say, to the Third Divine Person, the Sanctifier, as His particular and peculiar province. Christ is the first man entering into this new kingdom and by entering into it He places Himself under the direction of the Holy Ghost. He is, indeed, not a mere citizen, but the Head and the King. Nevertheless as man He has become a member of this Kingdom, just as the head is a member of the body, and He must win citizens for the Kingdom. Though that Kingdom has been prepared for centuries, it begins only now, and with it commences the guidance by the Divine Spirit which the Savior always will follow most faithfully, no matter

how exacting its demands. He feels the need of it, He is humble enough to acknowledge it and generous enough to follow it.

*Applications.* 1) "Whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8, 14). The divine Sanctifier undertakes our direction from the moment we enter the Kingdom of God by Baptism. He watches over the temporal life of the children of God with His especial providence. He directs us through His visible representatives, the ecclesiastical authorities and all those whom the latter call to their aid. He guides us interiorly through the voice of conscience; and if we lead a really interior life, His inspirations will ever be present, now suggesting and encouraging, now warning and holding back. It is for us to follow the direction and according as we allow ourselves to be guided, so are we good and faithful children of God.

Let us examine ourselves as to whether we appreciate this guidance and how we follow it. What about the directions given by the ecclesiastical authorities? What about those of our immediate superiors and spiritual directors? What about fidelity to inspirations?

2) Just as in the direction of the man Christ, so in every point that concerns Holy Church, and in the work of our vocation, the guidance of the Holy Ghost is twofold. He guides us in what concerns our personal sanctification, and in what concerns the salvation of those under our charge. We must, therefore, seek His advice and help in our work for others. Without Him even our best efforts avail nothing, because they concern supernat-

ural affairs in which man is unable to work without supernatural aid. How important is it, therefore, to pray to Him often for light and assistance and to follow these when granted. How unreasonable and dangerous is it on the other hand in affairs of this kind to neglect, nay to contravene, the directions given us by the proper authorities.

II. JESUS GOES INTO THE DESERT. "Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert."

The Holy Ghost is God, and God's ways are not man's ways. No man following his natural reason would go into the desert for the purpose of founding a kingdom, but into the company of men; not into a solitude to prayer and penance, but to the crowds, to splendid deeds and notoriety. But the direction of the Holy Ghost is just the contrary. The time will come when He shall send the God-Man to the crowds, when He shall allow Him to work miracles to attract the multitudes, and make them burst forth into praise and admiration. Even then this will not constitute His ultimate end and aim, but only the means to it.

Christ obediently permitting Himself to be guided, will go to men in order to call them out of the hustle and bustle of the world into the desert, at least into the solitude of their own hearts. He will work miracles in order that people may believe His words and follow His doctrine. He knows what He has to think about the "Hosannahs" of the multitudes, and when their enthusiasm will reach its climax, He will either disappear or in serious words direct the mind of the crowd

away from earthly glamor to the heights of the supernatural. These are the ways of the Holy Ghost.

*Applications.* 1) The natural man in us has little understanding for the ways and thoughts of God. Christ has come to open our eyes to them, and only if we view things in the spirit of faith, shall we understand them. We certainly must go to men in order to win them for Christ and God. But our road must lead through the desert. The Church and all who do her work must conciliate people by actions that strike the eye, just as the Savior works miracles that attract attention. But these deeds are not the end, they are only the means to prove the mission of the Church, to make men believe her and love her divine institutions. The Church, and we too, may at times be surrounded by jubilant multitudes, but we must not bask in their sunshine; for this is not the purpose for which God sends that sunshine. He will take care that the splendor will fade and the jubilant cries be silenced or changed into very different exclamations. These are the ways of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, let us guard against the temptation to vainglory or the seeking of notoriety in our work. It is not notoriety that saves souls, nor is it the chief means to win them, but the humble, modest work of teaching and helping men as Christ does. His miracles are only the means to make His work efficacious. The priest who tries to make a name for himself, the religious who seeks to shine in the eyes of men, are not the instruments of the Holy Ghost nor followers of His guidance, but worshippers of veritable idols. Idolatry brings nobody to Christ, neither him who practices it nor those who see it.

2) Solitude, at least the solitude of recollection, is essential for any one who works for the Kingdom of God. Christ at the very beginning of His public career goes into solitude and spends alone with God more than a whole month of the forty given Him for His work. And how often is it mentioned of Him that He spent the night in retirement and prayer. We may be very busy in working for the Kingdom of God, but we must not let the multiplicity of our occupations interfere with our solitude, with the periods of prayer established by rule or adopted by our free choice after serious consideration. Prayer is the first and most important means in our work; everything else is only secondary. It may be that at certain times we have to curtail our prayers for the benefit of souls; but this must never become the rule. And if we are very busy, we ought to make even greater efforts to be recollected in our prayers. An attentive study of Church history and of the lives of those who have done most for the Kingdom of God shows that the great men and women of the Church have invariably been and still are assiduous in prayer.

III. JESUS TEMPTED. "Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted by the devil."

Is not this a strange statement? Christ is by the Holy Ghost led into the desert for the purpose of being tempted by the devil. Personally, the Savior is far above any temptation. But here the foundation of God's Kingdom takes place and therefore, the King and Founder puts on the colors which His subjects must wear. The entire condition of mankind at this time shows to what state man has come since Adam's fall. The prince of

darkness is reigning in the world and he will not surrender his dominion without a conflict. War and struggle, therefore, are necessary for the foundation of the Kingdom of God. Not only the Holy Ghost is a guide for man, the evil spirit is one too, though not in virtue of any right, but by the worst kind of usurpation. The Holy Ghost guides through conscience, the devil through concupiscence. The Holy Ghost has human beings through whom as His instruments He wills to direct us; the devil, too, has minions enough among men. Scripture calls them "the world depraved," which entices through seduction. In temptations, Satan tries to make us walk his road by conjuring up terrifying or enticing images and thus making us suffer from fear of a loss and evil or from the difficulty in doing good. He, in a sense, has a conversation with us, representing to us on the one hand the pleasure or other advantage to be gained from following his suggestion, and on the other the trouble, the loss, the suffering to be encountered by not following his will. Therefore we need, and according to God's direction are to obtain, in Christ "a high priest who can have compassion on our infirmities, because he was tempted in all things as we are" (Heb. 4,15). And as the devil converses with us, so he is permitted to converse with Jesus.

*Applications.* 1) "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3, 12). The tempter stirs up exterior and interior persecutions and by both kinds attempts to force or entice men away from

the road pointed out to them by God. He who commits himself to the guidance of the Holy Ghost has the devil as his enemy. Therefore, we must expect temptations and be ready for them both in our private lives and in our work. They will be either open assaults which rouse our feelings and passions without concealing their sinfulness, or deceptions which try to ruin us under the appearance of good. We must always, but above all during temptations, cling to our divine guide, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth and light, the Spirit of strength and comfort. We must try to learn how we can distinguish His impulses from those of the devil or our fallen nature. The gift of "discernment of spirits" is absolutely necessary in the spiritual life. Without it we cannot "possess our soul in peace," as St. Ignatius expresses it, because we shall either be in constant fear that we are not faithful to God's inspirations or by permitting ourselves to be guided by the suggestions of the enemy of human nature, we shall fall into disturbance of soul, which invariably is a consequence of his direction and the promptings of our fallen nature. Yet peace of soul is very necessary for spiritual progress, and without the gift of discernment of spirits we can not avoid serious mistakes, which will retard us or paralyze our energies.

The guidance of the Holy Ghost and the gift of discernment of spirits is equally necessary for the direction of others. Reason alone is not sufficient; for here we move in the realm of the supernatural, which, while based on nature, is regulated by laws that in part are contrary to nature. If we do not possess this gift, even though we may not have to take upon ourselves the task of a spiritual director, we are liable to cause much harm and untold dif-

ficulties and absolutely useless fears and doubts to our charges.

In order to distinguish between merely natural impulses, suggestions of the devil and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, we must know the rules laid down by the teachers of spiritual life, watch the emotions of our heart, follow faithfully what we know to be inspirations of God and reject energetically what we know to be the promptings of fallen nature or urges of the evil spirit. We learn by instruction and experience. At the same time we render ourselves worthy of further and more perfect lights and inspirations by this appreciation of the divine guidance.

Let us above all cling to our Divine Guide in the hour of temptation. By His light and strength He will help us to escape the snares of the devil.

2) If the Holy Ghost leads Christ into the desert to be tempted by the devil, we have in this the best proof that temptation is no sin nor in itself a sign of our being in a bad spiritual condition. If the temptation is the result of our want of watchfulness over ourselves or of other faults, chiefly that of our exposing ourselves wantonly to the occasion of sin, only then can we say that temptation is a cause for misgivings. Therefore, freedom from temptations is not in itself a proof of growth in holiness, as increase in the number or vehemence of foul suggestions is by itself no proof of our lapsing. Temptation must not discourage us. Christ was tempted too.

3) Christ, the God-Man allows Himself to be tempted for our sake. How much love and humility does He show

in this. Here we see again that Jesus deems nothing too much or too lowly for Himself where the welfare of men is concerned. Let us trust His kind heart and love Him with a humble and great love.

COLLOQUY. Thank the Holy Ghost for the guidance of Christ, since it is for our benefit; and for His directions to you both for yourself and in your work. Ask pardon for all neglect of His inspirations. Thank Christ for His faithful obedience to the Divine Spirit and for the love He shows us in submitting to the humiliation of being tempted. Offer the resolution of following the direction of the Holy Ghost. Prayer for His guidance. "Veni, Sancte Spiritus, et emitte coelitus, lucis tuae radium."

## Meditation 21

### THE TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST (Matt. 4,2–10)

"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry. And the tempter coming said to him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: It is written: Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him up into the holy city, and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him: If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written: That he hath given his angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain: and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus said to him: Begone, Satan; for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him alone shalt thou serve."

The struggle which Christ has to wage here is not a private one, but Messianic. By using a natural need and enticing prospects, the devil tries to direct His Messianic activity into wrong channels so that not God's

dominion, but merely human considerations may become decisive for His actions. If Satan succeeds in this, the prince of the world will again thwart God's intentions as in Paradise, and a second time the establishment of the Kingdom of God will be prevented.

However, although the tempter knows very well how to utilize the situation and how to ingratiate himself, a short and decisive word of the Lord immediately confounds his machinations. Jesus knows what He wants, and He wants it thoroughly. The quiet simplicity and wonderful firmness of Christ can not but completely frustrate the cunning of the tempter.

Let us ask the Savior to teach us how to fight against the malicious endeavors of the enemy, not only when we must act as the representatives of the Kingdom of God, but when we must fight for this Kingdom in our own soul.

1. "IF THOU BE THE SON OF GOD." Twice Satan introduces his temptation with these really ominous words and with that ominous "if," which he uses and which his minions, too, employ so often when tempting men. The revelation of the Son of God, who is to carry out the divine designs concerning man's salvation, has also brought the adversary of God to the field of action. The words "Son of God," "Messias," permit many interpretations. They may be explained in the sense in which we Christians understand them, or in the signification in which Oriental and Occidental pantheists interpret

them, or in the meaning which Israel gives them, or finally in the sense which modern rationalists attribute to them. So far Satan has gloriously succeeded in misinterpreting them for Israel. The chosen people has merely human ideas about the Messias and wants to see them carried out. The Kingdom of God which they want, is not God's dominion over all creatures, but Israel's political mastery over the entire world and its control over God, too, who must assume the rôle of its general protector and provider, the worst possible nepotist. Satan has played upon the national pride and made Israel accept in all seriousness this horrible caricature of an infinitely perfect God.

Now he attempts to accomplish in Christ what he has achieved with so much success in other Israelites. Jesus must be made to seek a kingdom of the world instead of the Kingdom of God. If this is accomplished, the rule of the prince of this world is assured and Christ Himself has entered his service. The devil attempts even to conquer "the Son of God," and to make Him his vassal.

A bold attempt this; but it is carried out with all the shrewd psychology which Satan has learned in the course of centuries. He begins with the words: "If thou be the Son of God." What keen and malicious psychology lies in this "if." For as this form can imply conviction and trust, but also doubt and suspicion, it is used in the strongest appeals to the good and evil passions of man. "If you mean what you say"; "if you are my friend"; "if you are what I think you are"; "if

you can help"; then do thus and so. Satan shrewdly voices a doubt in Christ's dignity as it was proclaimed at the Jordan and not only sinful pride, but misunderstood zeal for the glory of God might prompt a man to enter upon his suggestion.

*Applications.* 1) We must not be surprised if we are tempted by the devil. Although he has heard Christ proclaimed by Heaven as the beloved Son of the Father, he makes Him the object of his attacks. We must not be surprised if the temptation overtakes us in the holiest places and during the holiest occupation; for Satan attacks the Savior and even lays bodily hold on Him while He is devoting Himself to prayer and penance. We must not be surprised, but be on our guard when the devil attempts to pervert our ideas about the service of God and sanctity, about the Church and her government. He tries to pervert even in the Son of God the ideas of the Kingdom of God and by fraud to substitute the service of the prince of the world for the task of the Messias. The most dangerous temptations are those which are cloaked in the garb of God's honor and service. The tempter only too easily succeeds in adulterating the supernatural truths of God's Kingdom, the Church, Christian perfection and the like, with ideas taken from the world, hostile to the supernatural. When thoughts and suggestions coming to us clash with the ideas of those placed over us or with what has been sanctified by the usage of ages, we must be very careful. Too much of false spirituality and real sensuality and pride is suggested on the plea of God's service, the salvation of souls, the honor

of God, proper self-respect and the like. Even a very materialistic and sensuous culture of the body is recommended nowadays as exercise of self-control and mortification. Is it probable that any of the really proper and useful means to acquire virtue and holiness have been overlooked in the Church guided by the Holy Ghost, and that they have been discovered in this twentieth century by persons who have no idea of spirituality and often are not even Catholics? The Church and her official organs are always safe guides; her doctrine and customs will never lead us astray, but often help us to detect the sophisms of the devil and the world.

2) Above all let us treat with great distrust those insinuations that have a personal appeal in them, those that either explicitly or implicitly contain the ominous "if." That "If thou be the Son of God" of the tempter in the desert of Judea has many variations. "If you are a true patriot," "if you are charitable," "if you are wise," "if you are the man I always have taken you to be," "if you have zeal for God's glory," "if you are grateful." And it is followed by a suspicious and treacherous "then": Then do what is not in harmony with your vocation, then neglect your prayer for some very specious, but really useless work, then do violence to your conscience, then give way to imprudent zeal, then waste your time on trifles and accidentals instead of your proper work. We must test this "If" and this "Then" with the norms of Christ and His gospel, with the will of the proper authorities, before we cry out: "God wills it," and take service with Satan for the benefit of the kingdom of the world.

II. THE INSINUATIONS OF THE TEMPTER. Here it will be profitable to consider both the matter and the form. As to the matter, the insinuations are three.

The first demand of the devil is: "Command that these stones be made bread." Here the demon voices exactly the Jewish idea of the Messias and His work. He is to relieve every earthly want, feed men with Manna from Heaven, free them from earthly cares and troubles, bestow gratis not only the necessities, but also the luxuries of life in abundance, so that the only task for Israel shall be the undisturbed and unlimited enjoyment of earth.

When the Savior has rejected this lowest demand of the animal in man, Satan, like the clever psychologist that he is, rises to a more ideal insinuation. "Cast thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple" and majestically glide down among the awe-stricken multitude filling the court below. It is honor, splendor, glory he now promises, and promises not on an earthly title, but on the highest and heavenliest; for the halo of the Messias and Son of God is to surround Jesus. This is again in perfect harmony with Israelitic views. It is precisely just such a sign in the heavens that later on they will repeatedly demand of Jesus; but this too is not in accordance with the true Kingdom of God, which is no theatrical and spectacular institution for the entertainment of curious crowds, nor a society founded for the purpose of giving some persons a chance to do things which worldly-minded people call "great," and

of furnishing the desired number of dumb-founded admirers.

In the third temptation the devil, realizing that the Lord is above the allurements with which he is able to seduce the generality of men, offers Him all that an ambitious heart can wish and all that human passion of every sort and kind may desire: the rule of the world with all that this implied in the days of paganism. "All these (i. e. all kingdoms of the world and the glory of them) will I give thee." And here again he acts according to Jewish ideas about the Messias, whose political sway over the whole world the Jews of the day describe in the gaudiest colors and to which all their desires are directed. But of course, in this temptation he can not say: "If thou art the Son of God." For he who chooses this dominion for his religious ideal, has put himself in the place of God and instead of God's Kingdom seeks his own. This kingdom Satan promises on one condition: "If falling down thou wilt adore me."

Here again we see the psychology of Satan. If one is faithful in combating temptations, the devil often makes a desperate attempt and onslaught trying to stir up every passion of which man is capable, to create confusion, to rouse the whole interior of man, frighten him by the foulness of his suggestions into feeling like a degraded man, to make a terrible manifestation of his power, to impress his victim with the impossibility of resisting and finally to drag him into sin.

As to the form of the temptations we must not fail

to notice that in all three of them Satan tries to render the Savior untrue to His vocation. It is not merely that He wants Him to commit sin, but to ruin the Kingdom of God, and to use His vocation merely for selfish ends. As he has succeeded in rendering Israel unfit for its calling, so He now tries to do the same with the Savior. In the first two temptations He is to use His Messianic dignity and power for selfish and earthly purposes, in the last He is with brazen openness tempted to become the highest official in the kingdom of Satan. In all three He is urged to work for the empire of the prince of this world. In all these temptations we see illustrations of some of the peculiar temptations to which are exposed all who by their vocation are obliged to work for God's Kingdom.

*Applications.* 1) The first of the peculiar temptations to which an apostle is exposed and which endangers his vocation and his work for the Kingdom of God is "to change stones into bread." It is a temptation to obtain money and the things for a livelihood in the wrong way. For the priest it is the temptation to obtain money and such pleasures and amusements as do not befit his state; for the religious it is the temptation to be lax in matters of holy poverty. One who wishes to become rich in and through the priesthood or to use his religious state to secure for himself a more comfortable life than is in accord with his vow of poverty, succumbs to the first and clumsiest attack of Satan. Not only will such people commit many sins, but become unfit for the work of apostles and, instead of winning souls for Christ, drive them away

from the Church. Had the clergy not been so grasping and had religious been more conscientious in observing the vow of poverty, the sad "Reformation" of the sixteenth century could never have driven millions away from Christ and His Church. Greed for money and the goods of this earth, laxity in poverty, kills the sacerdotal and religious spirit. Let us always be on the safe side in these matters and do more in despising worldly goods and pleasures than is absolutely necessary. Strictness in this point is not amiss. Let us examine ourselves before God whether we are observing the laws and regulations of the Church and of the society to which we belong as we shall wish to have observed them when we come to die. It may also be good to ask ourselves in what point we can do more than we have done so far.

2) The second temptation of Satan is ambition. He has not allowed this powerful weapon in his war against the Kingdom of God to rust at any time. Some he tempts to strive after preferment and honors, others he urges to seek the esteem of men or to yearn for fame; some he deceives with the desire of a wrong independence, others he moulds into boasters. And for such purposes they abuse the powers and the work of their sacred calling. It is not always the glory of God and the honor of the Church which is sought. The glamor of honor and reputation easily blinds man. If we wish to be safe from this vice, it must be our endeavor to remain in obscurity, to prefer to be subject rather than to command, to keep our name out of the papers, to be silent about the success we achieve with God's grace and not to refuse any work or position on the ground that there is no honor in it or that our work is not recognized.

We are not safe even from the third temptation. The "world" to which Satan points and draws our attention, is often small enough and not over-attractive, when he tempts us to seek personal influence. How easily and imperceptibly can personal domineering, at least in certain spheres and details, usurp the place of God's dominion. Often the "world" which is promised to one so deluded by the enemy of human nature is the realm of jealousy, the realm of what has been called "clerical envy." A jealous apostle works not for Christ nor for the real spread of the Kingdom of God, but for his own little kingdom.

3) A striking peculiarity of the first two temptations consists in their being invitations to abuse the powers of one's vocation, while that of the third consists in an attempt to rouse every passion of which human nature is capable. The power of working miracles is not given to the Man Christ for His personal benefit, but for the spread of the Kingdom of God. If He really needs food, it can be gotten without changing stones into bread. And in suggesting to Christ that He cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple it is not only the disorder that lies in the theatrical nature of the performance that makes it bad, but that at the suggestion of the devil He is to force the angels to render Him service. Satan does not yet know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God not in a metaphorical or analogous sense, but in the strictest meaning of the word. As man He may use the supernatural powers He possesses, and command the help of the angels, only according to God's intention, not according to the devil's behests. Both of these suggestions concern sacrilegious actions. And both times it is self-interest

that is the end and purpose. In a similar manner the devil tempts the apostle to use his powers and his vocation for personal temporal interests. Often he tries to spoil his work by inducing him to seek merely his gratification and pleasure in the functions of his vocation. We certainly should like our work and it is but right to find pleasure in it, but this must not be the motive from which we perform it.

Perhaps nobody by God's permission is tempted as often as an apostle in such a way that all his passions are roused and he feels like a veritable demon. He opposes the devil not only in his own person, but in all those for whom he works. Therefore, it is but natural that the enemy of human nature directs his fiercest attacks against him. We must, therefore, not be astonished if we feel them; on the contrary, they should give us courage and confidence; for they show us that after all we are making inroads into the dominion of Satan.

III. CHRIST'S ANSWERS. Jesus calmly repels the temptations as deceptions and in each case He answers in the words of Scripture. Thus He always proposes God's will as the deciding norm without letting His judgment be confused. By this He strikes each time the principal point at issue and frustrates directly the real aim of the devil. God's Kingdom here on earth consists in doing God's will; that of the prince of this world, in doing the will of the demon and of fallen nature. By emphatically declaring that He intends to do only what God wants Him to do, He blunts the edge of the temptation and shows the demon that He fully understands the nature of his suggestions. Satan must

see that with a man of such firmness of mind he has lost his game.

In answer to the first temptation Jesus quotes the words of Moses. The prophet in that passage tells the people of Israel: "He (God) afflicted thee with want (in the desert), and gave thee manna for thy food, which neither thou nor thy fathers knew: to show that not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Deut. 8,3). The meaning of these words is: When the Israelites had nothing to eat on the march through the desert, God gave them food to show them that man's life can be sustained not only by the nourishment which he prepares, but also by food that God provides. The Savior, therefore, tells the tempter: "Man's life can be sustained not only by food, but in other ways, if God wants it. Therefore, if He wants Me to be without bread and suffer hunger, He nevertheless will preserve My life. I need not work a miracle, as you want Me to do, because God can support Me in many other ways." The term "word of God" in Scripture is often used to designate the divine will.

The devil takes his cue from the physical exhaustion and hunger of Christ and tries to confuse Him so that He may act contrary to God's will. The Savior confutes him by a reference to the Scriptures. In the second attack Satan, the clever psychologist, attempts to confuse Him again, this time by quoting the Bible in his turn, but his quotation is faulty. The Psalmist is not speaking of a man who throws himself down from

a precipice and wantonly exposes his life, but of one who falls into the snares of enemies and is overtaken by dangers. Jesus, instead of merely correcting the false citation, exposes the sinfulness of the action suggested. "To tempt God" means in Scripture to provoke His wrath by presumptuously relying too much or by diffidently relying too little on the divine promises. God has not promised His protection to foolhardiness.

The devil, realizing that He can not tempt Jesus either by specious and fallacious appeals to human reason and sensuality nor by wrong quotations of Scripture and appeals to pride, in the third temptation appeals to every passion that is in man and, as it were, relying on the feeling of degradation and wickedness which the violent commotion of the entire fallen nature must produce, now proposes something desperate, something, therefore, that harmonizes with such an interior state, the worship of Satan. In his answer Jesus first of all shows His just indignation and the full strength of His will, which the demon has not succeeded in paralyzing. At the same time He manifests His utter contempt of the prince of darkness and humiliates him thoroughly, by commanding him to depart. "Begone," He exclaims, and that one word makes the devil tremble; He adds: "Satan," thereby showing him that He knows the personality of the tempter and can not be duped by him. He adds: "for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve." Thus Christ once more expresses His readiness at all times to do God's holy will and nothing but God's will.

*Applications.* 1) Here we see how we must meet temptations. The prime requisite is calmness of mind and self-possession. Our Savior remains perfect master of the situation even under conditions that in themselves are terrifying. Three times He is taken hold of bodily by Satan, when He is carried to the pinnacle of the temple, when He is taken back and when He is carried to the top of the mountain. But He remains perfectly calm. Even that worst of all suggestions, to adore the devil, He meets with indignation indeed, but without fear and excitement.

The second requisite is a clear and sober judgment. The devil only too often makes use of specious and fallacious arguments and always tries to confuse the mind of his victim. The word of God, consultation with our spiritual director, reading and calm reflection will do much towards acquiring and retaining clear ideas. Even texts of Scripture are misquoted, principles of spirituality perverted or wrongly applied by the tempter; at times statements falsely attributed to those with whom we have to deal are made use of by him to further his designs. Therefore, he who wishes to promote the Kingdom of God and ward off the attacks of the devil both in his own case and in that of others, must be well-instructed. If we do not see clearly, we must not be too proud to seek advice from those who can help.

Thirdly, we must have the determined will to adhere firmly to the will of God. In more violent temptations the great difficulty lies often in this that it seems so hard to deny oneself, to give up one's own pleasure and accept the cross. This difficulty is increased by the notion which the devil is wont to propose at that time, namely that without the good which the temptation suggests or with

the evil it urges us to avoid, our life will be permanently miserable, that the struggle will never end, that all joy will be withdrawn from us. This is one of the favorite deceptions of the enemy of human nature, which we must banish, and be firmly convinced that life never is nor can be a course of unmixed misery for the faithful servants of God.

Another activity that the will at times has to exercise in temptation consists in using the force necessary to keep quiet and not to become excited or even frantic. Though we do not realize it, God is never nearer to us than when we are tempted.

2) How much love and humility does the Savior show in permitting Himself to be tempted by the devil in such a foul way! We shall never be tempted as far as Christ; for the devil will never try to make us adore him. Nor will he take bodily hold of us, as he did of the Savior. "Like us in everything, sin only excepted." How much consolation lies in the temptations of Christ. How much strength to resist the devil. And how clear the lesson Jesus gives concerning the resistance to be offered.

3) As Christ is tempted for us, so those who continue His work will be tempted for those entrusted to their care. The temptation of the apostle often is a vicarious suffering; he is tempted that others who are less able to stand the trial, may be spared. Let us take upon ourselves the cross of temptations in this spirit. Thus it will prove salutary not only for us, but for others also.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the love Our Savior shows us here, and for the light and strength we derive

from Christ's temptations. Prayer for light and strength and fidelity in temptation. "Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord, that Thy people may always avoid the contagions of the devil and always seek Thee with a pure mind. Through Christ Our Lord." (Prayer for the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.)

## Meditation 22

### CHRIST'S VICTORY (Matt. 4, 11)

"Then the devil left him: and behold, angels came and ministered to him."

The outcome of the attack which the devil made on Christ could not for a single moment be doubtful. After all his successes against mankind, even against the people of Israel and so many of its most distinguished men, Satan at last found a man who was invulnerable. The tempter was silenced by every answer Christ gave, and when Jesus in holy indignation cried out: "Begone, Satan," he had to yield. Christ had left the restoration of His impaired bodily strength and the glorification of His Person and office to God. Now angels of Heaven came to minister to Him.

Christ, the Son of God in the weak form of man, surrounded by ministering angels: this is the picture of the issue of the great combat. He began His work as Redeemer with those three great temptations. If we resemble Him in the combat, this is also the image of what we soldiers of Christ have to expect after the battle.

Let us ask for the grace that by the example of Christ we may be encouraged to make the sacrifices and prac-

tice the self-denial which the Kingdom of God demands of us; for "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulations, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4,17.18).

1. THE DEVIL SILENCED. "Then the devil left Him." Every answer with which Christ meets the suggestions of the tempter silences him. It is first of all Christ's appeal to the word of God that renders him speechless. Satan's first two demands may seem to be based on good reasons. The suggestion to change stones into bread is founded upon the supposition that Christ is the Son of God. But Jesus is urged to exercise His power where there is no necessity for it and, as is shown by the answer He gives Satan, in a manner which implies that the Father is wanting in care of His human nature. Counter to his suggestion, Our Lord cites His Father's power and like an obedient son leaves Himself entirely in His hands. God has taken care of the people in the desert, just as He is in the desert; He did so in a miraculous manner, but only as long as the people were submissive to His will and guidance (Deut. 8,3 ff). So He will let Himself be directed by the will of the Father absolutely and in everything, and God will not forget Him. Against this trust in God, this submissiveness and abandonment, Satan can not urge even a specious reason.

In the next temptation Satan, taking his cue from

Christ's quoting the Scriptures, cites the sacred book too and tries in his turn to utilize the guidance of Israel by God. He chooses the promise made by Jahweh to His people at Mount Sinai (Exod. 23,20), but in the form which the Psalmist gives it (Ps. 90,11). Christ again is urged to enforce the fulfilment of a divine promise instead of waiting for an order or direction which God must give in such a case as casting oneself from the pinnacle of the temple. Such a sin of presumption Israel had repeatedly committed when they murmured against a command received from the Lord in the desert, and demanded His miraculous help, basing their claim on His promise. But Jesus meets the tempter with the command God gave His people: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God," to which words Moses by divine authority added: "as thou temptedst him in the place of temptation" (Deut. 6,16). Christ knows no will of His own, for in Him the dominion of God is perfect. For this reason all the artifices of the tempter are futile and he is effectively silenced.

*Applications.* 1) When the Savior comes to found the Kingdom of God in us, He gives us an impregnable armor against which all the darts of the enemy are powerless. For the Kingdom of God in our hearts consists in this that we are thoroughly and consistently convinced that our only end here on earth is the service of God and that doing His holy will is not only best for us in the end, but surely will give us peace and contentment on earth; and that consequently we are habitually inclined and determined to seek and do nothing but what He commands

or desires. It is only when we keep a place in our hearts for something besides God or want to play our own providence, that there is an opening in our armor through which the arrows of the tempter can enter. If we permit God to direct everything and if we are not seduced by any false conclusions, however specious, to surrender this disposition of mind and will, Satan may perhaps tempt us, as he tempted Christ, but we shall remain entirely submissive to God and force Satan into silence. He may renew his attempt at another point, trusting in man's vacillating and changeable mind, and he may even renew it more insistently; nevertheless we on our part need seek no other answer, than "This is not God's will." How important is it, therefore, to renew this firm resolution frequently of desiring and seeking nothing in this world but the holy will of God.

2) Christ silences the tempter by an immediate reference to the will of God and thus strikes the heart of the temptation; for a temptation is an insinuation to commit a sin, and every sin is a transgression of the will of God. But besides the temptation we have the tempter, Satan, who has to be routed too. Christ does so by the very curt manner in which He replies to him. There lies a prudent and telling expression of contempt in this. He neither argues nor disputes with the devil, but treats him with calm and deliberate contempt. So we must neither dally with the suggestions of the evil one nor be frightened by him nor in any other way show him worthy of consideration. St. Ignatius is very explicit on this point in his rules for the discernment of spirits. He says: "It is in the nature of our enemy to become powerless and to lose

courage (while his temptations take to flight), when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual matters shows a dauntless front to the temptations of the enemy . . . ; and on the contrary, if the exercitant begins to fear and to lose courage in sustaining temptation, there is no beast so fierce on the face of the earth as the enemy of our human nature in prosecuting with intense malice his wicked designs" (Rules for the First Week. XII).

II. "THE DEVIL LEFT HIM." The devil does not easily yield the victory. If he is beaten at one point, he will renew the attack at another. If he can not veil his assault, he charges openly. At the same time he does not shrink from the most monstrous suggestions. Can anything more horrible be imagined than that the Son of God prostrate Himself before Satan to adore him? Yet even this he suggests. He does not mind the cost; he can offer the whole world with all its splendor for this act of homage, because he need not keep his word. However, if even a bona fide offer of the entire world is not tempting, he is defeated, because the man who takes his place above the visible world with all its trifles and all its tinsel, is also above the prince of the world. To him the devil cannot offer anything and of him he can demand nothing. He who really is subject to God and offers submissive adoration to Him alone, can command Satan with the voice of authority: "Begone," and Satan must yield. Such is the position of Our Lord; therefore, even were He not God, He could drive the tempter off and rout him completely.

*Applications.* 1) We need not be frightened if the most horrible temptation assails us. The devil probably never will demand that we fall down and adore him. It is also true that he never entices us with the prospect of dominion over the whole world. How paltry and contemptible often are the objects he dares to offer us. And yet, how readily do men, and possibly we among them, accept his miserable bargain. His promises are too frequently mere lies, but even if they were honest, what would we gain? Let us not deceive ourselves. In its last analysis every mortal sin is a bending of knees before Satan and an act of adoration offered to the devil and his idols. Man rebels against God and refuses to be his servant in order to prostrate himself, not before the whole world, but before the smallest pleasure and the least honor. There is but one means of forcing the tempter into retreat, and this consists in always carrying out to its very last detail the word of Christ: "The Lord thy God alone shalt thou serve." To do this we must have a lofty idea of, and a high regard for, the divine majesty and goodness, and be faithful in little things whenever the divine service is in question, not because such fidelity pleases us, but because God is God, our Lord and Father.

2) When the assault of the devil is greatest, he is nearest to defeat. In the last temptation Satan summons to his aid all the means at his command. He carries the Savior bodily to the top of the mountain and conjures up an optical illusion of the whole world and all that is glistening and full of glamor. According to St. Luke (4,6.7) he makes a pompous speech and emphasizes his power. But Jesus brushes aside all this display with one word and Satan has to leave. So it is with us too. When the tempta-

tion is fiercest, the end is nigh. It is the last and desperate attempt; with a brief act of the mind we can puncture that bubble, for it is nothing more. Let us not become discouraged at the very moment when victory is within our grasp.

III. THE JOY OF VICTORY. "And behold, angels came and ministered to him."

The Lord has refused to use His supernatural power for His own private profit without regard to God's command. He has left everything to God, both the care for His bodily needs and the revelation of His Messianic dignity. He has indignantly rejected the offer of the whole world and its glory, because adoration is due to God alone. Now the Father gives Him in abundance what He has been unwilling to secure in an unlawful manner. Angels are sent to minister to Him. Instead of the bread which He refused to make out of stones, He receives heaven-sent food. Adoring angels surround Him instead of a crowd of ignorant people; instead of the dominion over this visible world He has power over the heavenly hosts, who place all the splendor and all the treasures of a higher world at His disposal.

*Applications.* 1) God does not let Himself be surpassed in generosity. If He demands pure homage and obedience, if He commands us to deny ourselves and mortify our desires and inclinations, He does so neither for the purpose of withholding His gifts from us nor because He needs our homage and service. Sin and our own ruin con-

sist in this that we want to abandon God in whom alone rests true happiness, and that we in our narrowness and dullness of mind want to provide for ourselves against the wisest and kindest will of our Father, Who knows and wants only what is really advantageous for us. God wishes to prevent this by demanding our homage and obedience and by commanding us to deny ourselves. Moreover, it happens frequently that He gives us in a superabundant measure the very thing which we have sacrificed for His sake. He never forgets us. The more liberal we are towards Him, the less we think of ourselves, and the more unreservedly we place ourselves in His hands, the more shall we experience how kind the Lord is and how true it is that "to serve God is to reign."

2) Consider also the glorious result of Christ's temptations. What an untold amount of good has been caused by the victorious combat of Christ. How many graces has He merited for the world, for every one that is tempted. How many have been inspired to struggle faithfully by the gospel account of Christ's struggles. How much love has been enkindled in the hearts of many. All this is now a source of joy and of glory to the humble man who suffered Himself to be so terribly assaulted by Satan. It is in our power to add to this glory and joy and thus to show our gratitude towards Him.

COLLOQUY. Thank your Savior for the love with which He suffered Himself to be tempted. Profess your fidelity towards Him. Pray for that confidence in God which is forgetful of self even in trials and temptations.

"Our God is our refuge and strength; a helper in troubles which have found us exceedingly. Therefore we will not fear, when the earth shall be troubled, and the mountains shall be removed into the heart of the sea. Their waters roared and were troubled: the mountains were troubled with his strength. The stream of the river maketh the city joyful: the Most High hath sanctified his own tabernacle. God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved: God will help it in the morning early." (Ps. 45,2–6.)

## Meditation 23

### CHRIST'S RETREAT INTO GALILEE (Matt. 4,12.13)

"And when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he retired into Galilee: and leaving the city of Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capharnaum on the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and of Nephthalim."

The first evangelist omits a considerable portion of the early activity of the Savior, which according to the gospels of St. John and St. Luke may have comprised half a year. He never mentions the marriage feast of Cana, the memorable meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, the details leading to the final call of the apostles and other facts; but after describing the temptations of the Savior begins with the events that follow the arrest of the Baptist. All this is in perfect harmony with the thesis he is proving.

The activity of Christ's precursor found a sudden end. Herod cast him into prison. According to the statements of the evangelists the Jews themselves had a hand in this and St. Matthew very significantly says that "he was delivered up." The Savior after a short period of some months had now to fear the same fate. Therefore, He withdrew from the area which "the Jews" controlled, into Galilee, where He had found a place of

refuge from the same Jews in the days of Archelaus. This time He did not betake Himself to the city of His youth, Nazareth, but to Capharnaum on the lake of Genesareth in the territory of the tribes of Zabulon and Nephthalim. Here He fixed His quasi-domicile and in this busiest part of Galilee He intended chiefly to exercise His Messianic activity.

The first messenger of the coming Kingdom of God, the powerful Baptist, by his sermons on penance had become a victim of the leaders of Israel; for it is they above all who are designated by the name of "the Jews." He languished behind prison walls, in the power of Herod, and He who was to establish the Kingdom of God was forced to retreat in order not to meet with the same fate even before He had well begun His work.

The threat of the Baptist is in part already becoming a reality; for the principal portion of the activity of the Messias will take place not in Judea and Jerusalem, the centre of Judaism, but in "The Galilee of the Gentiles," where a genuine Israelite thinks himself degraded by the bustle of pagan merchants. The terms "Galilean," "Nazarene" for Jews are synonymous with "renegade"; yet these "renegades" are the adherents of the Messias.

If we resist grace, God's mercy withdraws from us. Even if it is not entirely taken away, it is far removed and we as a rule must make greater efforts in the use of the grace still given us. Unhappily, often enough we do not make these efforts and thus lose also what grace is left to us.

Let us ask for the grace to be careful not to resist God and not to enter upon a path the end of which we do not know, though we are responsible for the consequences.

1. THE BAPTIST IS "DELIVERED UP." John's fate became a prelude for that of the Messias. The jealousy and the bad conscience of those of whom he demanded sincere conversion to God instead of unbounded national pride, would soon cause the murder of another prophet in Israel. God had offered a very great grace to His people when He did not place them unprepared before the decision concerning the Messias and His Kingdom. Water and fire, life and death were before them (Eccl. 4,17.18). The Baptist tried in most serious terms to bring them to their senses before they stretched out their hand to choose their own ruin. But the monitor became too troublesome to the leaders. He threatened to destroy their authority and influence, he hurt their personal pride, he boldly exposed their worldly doings. The more he struck the right point and placed his finger on the sore spot, the more deeply did they feel the blame and the threat. And since they lacked the necessary strength, sufficient humility and unselfishness to follow his warnings, they rose against him and finally betrayed him to Herod. With an appearance of innocence they got rid of the heaven-sent messenger and helped to murder him.

*Applications.* 1) Here we have a telling example of the

lengths to which an unbridled passion, chiefly pride, can drive a man. He becomes insensible to every good influence either from within or from without and then grace finds his heart impervious and unimpressionable. Nay, he is stirred up to blind contradiction and stubborn resistance by even the gentlest intimation to submit, to acknowledge his errors and mistakes, were it only by a word or by modest silence. The suggestion to deny himself in anything rouses his fury. With closed eyes he transgresses every limit of right and justice and rushes into a ruin that would horrify a man who thinks sanely. He turns every remedy into poison and every attempt to save him into a means for his destruction. At the same time he boasts of his honesty and strength of character. And while he possibly may be very conscientious, nay even scrupulous, in certain little things, he has not the least qualm of conscience in ruining his opponent or monitor by every possible means. Real pride is truly satanic, even though it does not always impress others unfavorably, but at times, is even praised as nobility of mind.

Let us always be on our guard against the smallest outcroppings of pride. We can not guard effectively against it unless we bear in mind not only our lowliness and sinfulness, but the fact that if we wish to counteract this vice, it must cost us something and the effort will hurt. Humiliations are never pleasant to the natural in man; they are and must always be unpleasant, otherwise they would not attack our pride. Let us not be downcast if the humiliation hurts. Virtue lies in the will, not in the emotions. We can be really humble and yet feel the sting of the humiliation. Nobody is worried if fasting makes him feel the pangs of hunger; he realizes that if it did not do so, it

would not deserve the name of penance. The same is true of humiliations.

2) We see here too how the feeling of being hurt when we are reminded of a fault or receive a correction ought to make us realize the necessity of examining ourselves and finding out how well-grounded the admonition or correction is. It may be for our soul what the probing touch of the physician is for the body. The sound parts will not ache when they are pounded a little; but the more diseased a limb is, the keener will be the pain when it is touched by the doctor.

II. JESUS RETREATING. "And when Jesus had heard that John was delivered up, he retired into Galilee."

By the betrayal of the Baptist Jesus sees Himself forced to choose a field of activity different from the one originally intended by God. Judea, where the Pharisees and Sadducees are in power, is now as impracticable for His work as it was formerly for His residence. In Judea and Jerusalem, which naturally and according to God's intention should have been the principal scenes of His ministry, He will appear only as a temporary guest. Only in death shall He belong to Jerusalem, when the Pharisees and Sadducees will have attained the purpose which He now escapes only by retreating.

Since we know the Savior, we can form at least some idea of the graces of which the leaders of the nation deprived themselves and the people by their perversity. Nay more; they even created a new difficulty for them-

selves; for later on they were scandalized by Jesus coming from Galilee. His connection with that despised province made it still harder for them to receive Him, because they had to bow their proud heads still lower in order to acknowledge a Galilean as Messias.

*Applications.* 1) If we do not use the graces we receive or if we circumvent them, we lose very much. Every sin too has its natural consequences, often on our external circumstances, but always on our interior disposition. If then we wish to submit to the further direction of grace after sinning, these consequences must be overcome first of all. The greater our sins and the longer our resistance to God, the more will the difficulties increase which oppose our return to Him. The more deeply rooted a habit has become, the harder it is to get rid of. The more energy we have developed in the wrong direction, above all the more of that energy which manifests itself outwardly, the more strenuous is the effort needed for conversion. Hence we see how important it is to avoid the first fault. Barring small and infrequent human frailties, we must say that it is much easier always to do the right than to correct the wrong.

And would that the consequences of forfeiting graces and committing sins struck only ourselves; but this is rarely the case with an apostle. As the Pharisees and Sadducees drew the entire nation with them into perdition, so both the good and the evil deeds of one who is destined to be a leader, react on those whom he is to guide. Must not this be a powerful stimulus for us to avoid sin and make good use of all graces with greater care? For in every case we have to bear a twofold responsibility.

2) Christ is a fugitive a few months after His first public appearance and an almost total failure in that part of the rather small field of activity which He is permitted to have. His field of labor is now restricted to a small area hardly larger than the smallest state of our country. So little does the world realize the love and kindness of the Son of God in becoming man and laboring for souls. Let us not increase the extent of territory that is closed against Him by resisting His graces. There is a vast area from which He has to keep away. And if our sphere of action is limited, let us think of Him.

III. RESIDENCE AT CAPHARNAUM. "And leaving the city of Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capharnaum on the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim."

Jesus does not yet withdraw from the Jews entirely. On the contrary, He retreats only so far as is necessary, and this only in order to make His work possible among Israel. For this reason He does not again repair to sequestered Nazareth, which offered a proper refuge for His hidden life. He goes rather to Capharnaum, to the lake of Genesareth, where the traffic is busiest. Juda, Israel's prince and patriarch, does not indeed call it his home nor is it the place in which all the members of the chosen people congregate around the temple of God. It is the territory of Zabulon and Nephthalim, whose attractions do not consist in religious, but in secular interests, such as fertility of soil and favorable conditions for business and traffic. But the Good Shepherd must needs go after the lost sheep.

Although the people of the lake region are not the most zealous in their religion, but to a great extent are absorbed in temporal cares and pleasures, nevertheless they are not so deeply immersed and steeped in that religious-national pride and desire for ruling as the leading circles in Judea and Jerusalem. There is no room for Christ and His message where a self-conscious, religiously-colored fanaticism holds sway. But Christ can and will help that poor man who has fallen and acknowledges himself a sinner. Possibly the Kingdom of Heaven may gain an entrance into Israel through "the publicans and harlots," as the Lord will say later on (Matt. 21, 31). In any case it will not be Christ's fault if it does not.

*Applications.* 1) Christ is always the same. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just" (1 John 2,1). Even if one has fallen deeply, Christ stretches out his hand to lift him up. And even if one has repudiated Him and His graces, He does not abandon him immediately. He offers him further graces and pursues him even to places to which not God but totally different interests lead the sinner. There is only one thing which banishes the Savior without fail, and this is the self-satisfied mind, the proud soul, which puts self in God's place and considers God man's debtor. "God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace" (Prov. 3,34; James 4,6; 1 Pet. 5,5). He gives grace to the humble even if they have fallen into sin. If we guard against pride we may trust God in all circumstances. This should be borne in mind by every minister

of divine grace; for unless grace works in a soul, all our trouble will avail nothing. The misery of sin which renders man humble, never drives the Lord away.

2) The Savior really is indomitable in His efforts to promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The opposition and secret machinations of the Jews perhaps would have been more than sufficient for every one of us to abandon and turn completely away from that ungrateful nation. Many good people, above all many apostles, cannot endure opposition. If they are thwarted they give up altogether. We may be crossed by those for whom we are to work; we may be crossed also by those who have the right to direct and command us. If this happens we are prone to think that "this is more than enough;" and we do not feel inclined to labor any longer, but throw the responsibility on those who cause us difficulties. This is not the spirit of Christ. In our work for souls we may be frustrated, we may be refused the help which we very justly expect, we may be repudiated by those for whom we work. Let us like the Savior suffer this and find other means and ways of continuing the work for the greater glory of God.

COLLOQUY. Acts of atonement for the insult, the offence and ingratitude which the Lord suffers in this mystery. Petition for pardon for the faults committed by us when our efforts were not appreciated or not supported as we expected. Prayer for the spirit of humility and receptivity for divine grace. "Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create a clean heart in me, O God; and renew a right spirit

in my bowels. Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit. I will teach the unjust thy ways: and the wicked shall be converted to thee (Ps. 50,11–14).

## Meditation 24

### THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY

(Matt. 4,14–16)

"That it might be fulfilled which was said by Isaias the prophet: Land of Zabulon and land of Nephthalim, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people that sat in darkness hath seen a great light: and to them that sat in the region of the shadow of death, light is sprung up."

This is the seventh prophecy which the Evangelist shows to have been fulfilled in Christ. According to his way of thinking and to the idea of the Holy Ghost a symbolic completeness has been attained. The introduction to the description of Christ's work in Israel ends with it. Now the Messias is in the region in which He will develop His Messianic activity, and here again a prophecy is fulfilled. He appears in the land of Zabulon and Nephthalim, in Galilee of the Gentiles, preaching to "a people sitting in darkness," not to Israel that lives in the light of the Old Testament revelation. Night and darkness had come before Christ appeared; He is the sun of justice that rises to dispel it.

Let us turn to and accept this light. "The night is passed, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off

the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13,12).

I. THE LAND OF ZABULON AND NEPHTHALIM. Isaias says: "At the first time the land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim was lightly touched; and at the last the way of the sea beyond the Jordan of the Galilee of the Gentiles was heavily loaded." (Isaias 9,1.) In modern English the words mean: "As the former times covered the land of Zabulon and Nephthalim with disgrace, so the latter days will bring honor to the country by the sea, beyond the Jordan, the Galilee of the Gentiles." These northern parts of the kingdom of Israel were most exposed to the hostile attacks which God permitted in punishment of His people. Time and again the Syrians entered from Damascus, plundering and devastating, and after them, the Assyrians. Years before the fall of the kingdom of Israel, the territory of Zabulon, Nephthalim and Perea was annexed to the Assyrian empire. This is the disgrace with which the first times have covered them. They were chastised for sins which not only they but the rest of Israel had committed, and they were to serve as a warning example for their compatriots. The warning was indeed of little avail. However, as they have been chastised before the rest and for the benefit of others, now they receive the greatest graces before them; in fact, no land has had the privileges which are granted to Zabulon and Nephthalim.

*Applications.* 1) External punishments of God here on earth are by no means a general and sure norm by which to judge the interior goodness or wickedness of a people, least of all when they are intended for the correction of those punished. This is true in general about external welfare and prosperity as well as external sufferings and trials. Everything temporal, whether good or evil, has its real and deepest importance in being a means to lead man to his eternal destiny.

Moreover, every individual human being and every natural group of men must be considered not only in their individual character, but as members of a larger society, ecclesiastical as well as civil. As such they must not only share the fate of this society, but at times must suffer for its benefit; but as far as man's last end and his eternal salvation is concerned, every individual is judged by God according to his personal moral condition, and his eternal fate depends exclusively upon his own merits and demerits.

Thus a chastisement inflicted here on earth, even though inflicted as a deterrent for others, can be a real blessing in so far as eternal salvation is concerned. Nor is there injustice in this that some individuals of a family or group or society have to suffer for the evil done by others, though they themselves are possibly innocent; for in virtue of the solidarity which binds them together, those individuals participate also in the blessings of that society, and moreover, for them the sufferings are a trial and an occasion of great merit. They atone for others just as Christ by His sufferings atones for others precisely because He is a member of the human race that has offended God.

Moreover, even when chastising and trying, God is above all a loving father to us as long as we live on earth. Scripture says: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth: and as a father in the son he pleaseth himself," i. e., he is pleased or delighted; (Prov. 3,12). Therefore, we must not reject the correction nor turn away from Him, least of all we, who have charge of others. Nor must we forget that even here on earth God knows best how to distribute joy and sorrow. As Zabulon and Nephthalim had to feel His chastisement before the rest, so they now were distinguished by greater mercy. Those who have to suffer for others are never the losers before God. Let us think of this above all when the lightmindedness, indolence or other fault of those under our charge causes trouble which we have to bear instead of them.

2) Galilee of the Gentiles, the land held in deep contempt by the orthodox and "saintly" Jews, is the home of the Messias, the witness of His wonderful life and work, the recipient of most of His miracles. What a scandal for the zealots! Let us not be scandalised through jealousy. If we see others distinguished by divine favors which we lack, or called by God to do great work for His honor, whilst we have no such opportunity and achieve only meagre results or work only for a few, let us not become envious; otherwise we shall lose merit. Moreover, the Lord later on will show by a very significant parable that God does not worship success nor reward results, but considers only the good will. This good will we can have all the time. Or again, let us not feel hurt if others seem favored by God with special graces, whilst we have to get along with the ordinary helps. These are precious opportunities to sacrifice self and establish the Kingdom

of God in our hearts all the more deeply, firmly, thoroughly.

II. THE PEOPLE IN THE REGION OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH. Christ comes as Redeemer. Not only the scene of His activity, but His very audience is to manifest Him as such. This certainly is one reason why He chooses the people that "sit in darkness and in the region of the shadow of death" to let His light shine before them. The inhabitants of the territory around the lake of Genesareth and beyond the Jordan, "the Galilee of the Gentiles." are a clear type of unredeemed mankind. Night and darkness hold them captive. Like poor blind persons they do not see the sun of their lives, while the cold shadow of spiritual death chills them. When the prophet Isaias foresaw the slavery in which the pagan conquerors would hold them, he described it as a cheerless, cold and dark region plunged in perpetual night. The spiritual night that has fallen upon them is incomparably more horrible than the material misery caused by their state of servitude. They have been torn away from the people of the One True God and deprived of the only true religious worship instituted by God for them in the Old Testament. Israel's God is the only sun that can give light and warmth; but that sun has withdrawn from the land of Zabulon and of Nephthalim for centuries. Now the first rays of the new day are to be shed on these most pitiable among the poor in Israel and the sun of the Messianic Kingdom is to rise first on them.

*Applications.* 1) What Christ wanted to be at His first coming He is still today. "For God sent not his Son into the world, to judge the world, but that the world be saved by him" (John 3,17). No darkness is so dense and no night so cold that His rays do not penetrate, illuminate, and warm it. Our misery, religious or moral, must not keep us away from the Son of God. Christ has come precisely to those that sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death, in order that a bright and warm day may rise upon them. As those in darkness are attracted to the light and the chilled to the heat, so ought we to be attracted to the Savior. The more deeply and helplessly we feel ourselves plunged into this spiritual night, the more surely may we count on Jesus. He comes to offer His help wherever bodily and spiritual need reigns. Naturally our bodily and spiritual sufferings are only too apt to make prayer distasteful, to drive us away from the tabernacle and keep us benumbed and paralyzed in despondency. But we must overcome this feeling and drag ourselves into the sun of our spiritual life. The devil tries to impress us too much with our unworthiness; he attempts to persuade us that our many sins and imperfections are so offensive to Christ's sight that we ought to stay away from Him. He wants to convince us that we cannot pray and that we would only add more sins by the distractions we have. With St. Peter we feel inclined to cry out: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5, 8). But this would be a sad mistake and very displeasing to Christ. Yet, how often is this mistake made! Frequently people say that they are so excited as not to be able to pray. If we really are so very much disturbed, let us go to Him anyway and

remain in His loving presence without saying a word; He will look into our heart and quiet it.

2) Naturally we feel repulsed by the person who has no idea and feels no need of religion and spiritual things. We experience the same aversion in the presence of those who are despondent or so filled with the spirit of contradiction that only great patience and prudence can gradually and slowly effect a change for the better. Let us imitate the example of our Savior, Who goes first to those who need help most, and works among them patiently and perseveringly.

III. THE RISING LIGHT. Jesus is indeed the light of the world; for He is the promised Messias, since in Him all prophecies have been fulfilled. The evangelist measures the course of His whole life by the standard which the Old Testament gives for the coming Redeemer from His entrance into life (Matt. 1,22 ff), His first appearance (2,5.6), the events of His hidden life (2,15.17.23), the first announcement of His Messianic activity (3,3), up to the moment that He is about to enter on His public career (4,14–16). He is proved to be the Son of David whom Israel expects; He is shown to be the One who accomplishes what was foreshadowed by the liberation from the Egyptian and Babylonian captivity; He is verified to be "the fulfilment of the prophets," the last of whom has prepared His way; He is demonstrated to be "He that is to come"; for He is found in the place which the prophecy assigns to Him, the land of Zabulon and the land of

Nephthalim, the Galilee of the Gentiles. Now the moment has come; now He can raise His voice. If Israel will let itself be guided by the graces God has bestowed on it in its long history, if it will follow with reverence the voice of those whose words it hears every Sabbath in the synagogues, then it must acknowlege Him. God's messengers speak in His favor, even though the Jews thereby are required to give up their wrong notions. This Jesus of Nazareth, who now appears at the sea of Galilee and preaches penance in order to lead them into the promised Kingdom of God, is the Messias.

*Applications.* 1) For us, too, this fulfilment of all the prophecies is one of the divine seals which mark Jesus as the promised Savior in spite of His humble appearance. We do not want to consult our narrow human judgment, as did the Jews of old, but in humble submission accept the testimony of God. It is true, God's thoughts are not the thoughts of men, but thoughts of divine mercy and condescension, which surpass all human understanding. We may not grasp them when we consider the history of the mystic Christ, as it is worked out in the Church; we may be at a loss when we look at the way God directs our spiritual life in Christ; nevertheless God even here has not left Him without testimony; for the history of the Church is and remains a bright light which is reflected back on Christ Himself and glorifies Him.

And as far as our own life is concerned, the words which the Savior addressed to the Jews on the feast of the Tabernacles remain true forever: "If any man will (resolve to) do the will of Him (God), he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak

of myself" (John 7,17). All the human weakness which reason, unassisted by divine grace, may imagine to find in Christ, must not confuse us. "The people that sat in darkness, hath seen a great light: and to them that sat in the region of the shadow of death, light is sprung up." Christ Jesus is this light by which the "folly of the cross," the "unreasonableness" of so much of the interior life which scandalises the natural man are seen to be the wisdom of God. We may not see *how* they are true wisdom, but from Christ's example we can always conclude *that* they are.

This holds good not only of the dogmatic truths which we have to believe; it is equally true of the old and time-honored principles of Catholic asceticism which have been taught and practiced in the Church of God since the days of the apostles. We do not need post-bellum lights to point out the true way to please God. Therefore, let us raise our eyes and hearts to Him whom the Holy Ghost in this text has given us as the great light, that He may save us out of the darkness and lead us out of the region of the shadow of death. In these days when misguided persons wish to construe an asceticism other than that taught by Christ, let us be firmly resolved to follow His example and to meditate upon His life and words, to find the true way to virtue, holiness and Heaven.

2) Christ is the light of the world. How great is the certitude, how clear the teaching of Christ, concerning the affairs of the soul and of eternity. Let us compare our position as priests and religious with that of those outside the Church. How deep the darkness, how biting the cold, how benumbing the frost, of their ethical doctrines. We

are, like the land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim, favored with the light and warmth of Christ's doctrine and Christ's example. Let us be grateful not only in sentiment, but in deeds.

COLLOQUY. Acts of gratitude for the vocation to the true faith and the apostolate. Petition for a lively faith and great zeal in following Christ, remembering the words of St. Paul: "Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall enlighten thee" (Eph. 5,14).

## Meditation 25

### THE LAST PREPARATION

(Matt. 3,1–4,16. See meditations 14–24)

The first appearance of the Savior which the evangelist has reported, was a prophecy in facts, not in words, of what Christ had to expect from the people. At the time of these events no human mind could understand it, nevertheless God did not want to withhold an emphatic warning from the Jews. On the contrary, He called their attention to everything that was in store for them, before He confronted them with the reality and forced them to decide their own fate. For this purpose He sent the Baptist to introduce the Savior to the people.

Now every detail of what happened at the arrival of the Magi was repeated. As the wise men had announced the birth of the Savior, so John proclaimed the birth of the Messianic kingdom. As Herod, the political ruler of the people, in his selfish policy immediately designed plans for the death of the new-born king, so the Pharisees and Sadducees, the social and religious leaders, hardened in their national pride, directly took measures against John's message. As the Magi were confirmed in their faith by the re-appearance of the star, found

the child, and with the eye of faith discovered in Him the King they sought and adored Him, so John at the baptism of Christ knew the Savior, rendered Him homage and obtained from Heaven the confirmation of his doctrine. Under Herod God led the Savior into Egypt and by the murder of their own children made the Jews feel how little they could by their cowardice before Herod escape punishment even on earth. After His baptism the Holy Ghost led the Savior into the desert and in the temptations He made the devil realize how his attempts were of no avail, how his deceptions concerning a political Messias would be dissipated by Christ.

Herod's death brought Christ back to the land of Israel; the betrayal of the Baptist placed Christ on the scene of His activity; but again as on His return from Egypt, Jesus cannot live in Judea, which ought to be the proper place for Him, but must go to Galilee of the Gentiles, to the land of Zabulon and Nephthalim, to the people sitting in the shadow of death, instead of to Jerusalem and the conceited people of Judea. Thus begins the day, the morning of which shone upon the Magi. At length Israel ought to know what to do.

John the Baptist in unmistakable terms placed before the people the choice between the graces of the Messianic Kingdom and the judgment of infidelity. He showed them from which side ruin was threatening, and pointed to Him who was to bring salvation. Thus he stood on the boundary line between the Old and New Testament, but his fate no less than the first steps of the Messias

foretold what would be the result for Israel of the organization of the Kingdom of God. The whole appearance and the mission of the Baptist were a serious warning for the Jews. They retain the same significance for us. Let us ask for the grace to heed the warnings better than Israel.

I. THE NEW MESSAGE. Both the news of the birth of the King of the Jews and the announcement of the near approach of the Kingdom of God come to Israel quite unexpectedly despite Daniel's prophecy. The people are not prepared for either, though they at first give credence to both. This is shown by the answer the Scribes give to Herod and the Magi, and still more clearly by the great crowds that come to John and demand Baptism. However, both times the faith that rises spontaneously dies soon and suddenly. The first time it is killed by the fear of the Jews who tremble at the thought of the violence of Herod and of the temporal harm he may inflict. Thus the first manifestation has no beneficial results.

When the Baptist appears, he indeed causes the people to enter into themselves, but the leaders scorn the idea of penance and, consequently, flout the preacher of penance. The struggle for the control of the masses rages for some time with varying success, the priests and the scribes are not able to rob the Baptist of his influence entirely and permanently. St. Matthew will tell us later on how even on Palm Sunday, when the Lord enters Jerusalem in triumphal procession, they

do not dare to answer the Savior's question, whether John's baptism was "from heaven or from men," because they are "afraid of the multitude: for all held John as a prophet" (Matt. 21,25.26). But their attitude at the time of John's preaching justifies the fear that they will succeed in preventing a willing reception of Christ and His Kingdom, as announced by the Baptist.

Thus as Herod appeared behind the Magi to frighten the people away from Christ, so the priests and scribes loom behind John to drive them away from Jesus. There is only this difference: On the former occasion both those who invite the people to come to Christ, namely the Magi, and he who drives them away, namely the Idumean Herod, are foreigners; now the opposing forces, namely John the Baptist for Christ, and the leaders of the nation against Christ, are of the same race as those whom they try to influence. Thus the opposition and the struggle consequent upon it have their seat in the nation itself.

The public life of Our Lord will witness the last decisive battle in Israel between good and evil, between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. The outlook is dark from the very beginning, dark when grace is offered from without by means of the Magi, darker still when it is offered from within by the preaching of the Baptist.

Thus God over and over warns the Jews of the danger, and of the demands of the great hour which will strike at the appearance of Christ. While the warn-

ings connected with the coming of the Magi and the murder of the Bethlehemitic children is more implicit and couched in the language of events, it is clear and intelligible enough for any one who uses his reason. But God does more. When the decision is at hand, He discards every kind of imagery and symbolism. The Baptist tells them with a clearness and directness which is simply overwhelming, what is about to happen, and with a fearful impressiveness that ought not to leave them any doubt or choice in the matter, he conjures the people to adopt the correct position with regard to Christ.

*Applications.* 1) God does not act like the enemy of human nature, who casts nets and lays traps, as St. Ignatius says, to catch men and then condemn them. He indeed does not spare us trials and tests, but He also does everything to help us endure them. The decision lies with us; we are to make it with the full realization of what we do and what depends on it. This holds good for the individual and for the communities of men, for peoples and nations. The decision is not always easy. God's enemies are at work to influence it and make it accord with their wishes. Sometimes it is persons like Herod, people not of our faith, or not belonging to our state in life, who threaten from without. Sometimes it is the chief priests and scribes, men and women of our own faith and our own class and vocation, but weak in their religion and worldly in their ideas and aims. Sometimes it is a spirit within us, that disposition of mind and heart which John brands as absolutely wrong. And all these agents oppose their entire force and offer a stubborn resistance

to the will of God. "The life of man on earth is a warfare" (Job 7,1). Christ Himself says: "Do not think that I came to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but the sword" (Matt. 10,34).

Let us, therefore, not entertain the idea that the service of God is easy for human nature. It is a battle in which the highest possible interests are at stake and, therefore, the fiercest enemies must be overcome. This requires powerful efforts. In every severe temptation a decision must be made between Christ and Satan, between the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of the devil, between God and self, enthroned on some passion or some earthly advantage. Easy going spirituality is carnality. While despondency and pessimism are out of place in spiritual life, seriousness is a necessity, that seriousness which is based on a clear knowledge and deep conviction of the eternal principles of faith and is coupled with a generous disposition to sacrifice every earthly interest for the Kingdom of God.

2). God gave the people of Israel very extraordinary graces, but they made the fatal mistake of thinking that He gave them those favors merely for the purpose of making them happy on earth or for the mere enjoyment of the distinctions and gifts. It is the ever-recurring error of man that in practice he believes he can, or at least ought to, have Heaven on earth, and always forgets that the sole purpose of this life is the preparation for eternity. God bestows graces and gifts, but only as helps in His service. Our vocation, every spiritual consolation, every divine favor is but a preparation for work and sacrifice. We may not rest in them as in the end and aim of our

existence here on earth. Therefore, while we receive the blessings of divine love with gratitude and enjoy them to their full extent, let us not overlook their real purpose, but use them as means to strengthen ourselves for further work and further sacrifices. St. Ignatius says very appropriately in the tenth rule for the discernment of spirits: "Let him who is in consolation think how he will be in future desolation, gaining fresh strength for it." It is very probable that we should receive more consolations and favors from God if we did not make the mistake of resting in them and seeking merely to enjoy them. Such a use makes them a veritable poison for the soul.

II. THE MIRACULOUS APPARITIONS. The priests and Scribes, though sinful and unworthy of their dignity, nevertheless are the official and authoritative, though not infallible, interpreters of the Sacred Scriptures. They speak in the name of God when they answer the inquiry of the Magi concerning the birthplace of the Savior. God confirms their answer by the re-appearance of the star. But this miraculous sign, by which the dignity of Christ is made manifest, is followed by an event that humbles Him and obscures His dignity, the ignominious flight into Egypt. Moreover, only the Magi see the star re-appear. The rest have to accept the testimony of reliable men.

Furthermore, John the Baptist is sent by God. The truth of his testimony concerning Christ is confirmed by the miracles that happen at the Savior's Baptism. But they too are succeeded by events that humble Christ and cast a shadow on His dignity, the fast in the desert

and the triple temptation. Moreover, only John and those present at the Jordan witnessed the miracles.

*Applications.* 1). Does not God in a way seem to frustrate His own purpose? Here we come to an important truth that concerns not only the history of divine revelation, but is of paramount consequence in practical life both for the neophyte just becoming acquainted with the revelations of God and for all of us, whether priests or lay people, religious or seculars. It is this: God does not reveal Himself directly to every individual nor does He work the miracles proving one a divine messenger in the presence of every human being, and yet He obliges every one to accept His revelations and believe Him. Faith is a *"rational service."* It must be *"rational,"* it is no guesswork, no sentimental credulity, no stultification of our intellect, but assent based on reason. Reason tells us that God knows everything and cannot tell a lie. Reason, moreover, must assure us that the person who claims that God has spoken to him, really is a divine messenger. But it is to be *"a service,"* an act of humility. We must acknowledge that our understanding is not able to discover all truths by its own unassisted efforts, and that other men (in this case the divine messengers) know more than we. A rational service also includes the willingness of submission. The motives by which we obtain the certainty that God really has revealed this to His mediators and is speaking through them, are sufficient to convince everyone who has a good will, but they are not so evident and striking as to compel the assent and conviction of those who are unwilling.

All this is true not only of revelation in general, but

also of its applications to individual cases. In spiritual life every one must have a director and obey him. God leads men through other men, therefore through obedience. Here is another occasion for the practice of humility. Sin is pride, the remedy is humiliation. Willing obedience and submission of intellect as well as of will to a spiritual director is a humiliation. But that director must be one to whom the representative of God and great mediatrix of revelation, the Church, has given the right and authority to speak in His name.

2) Again another truth is illustrated in the history of Israel's preparation for Christ. The natural man would think that God ought to have used the opportunities that presented themselves in the adoration of the Magi and the wonderful signs at the Jordan, to prepare a great triumph for the truth. He would wish that "everything might have run smoothly." Instead of this we see only opposition, difficulties and waste of opportunities. The history of Christ, of the Church, of every great undertaking of God, nay of our own spiritual life, does not read like a nursery tale in which the golden opportunity always leads to great results on the smooth path. On the contrary, it teems with disappointments, failures, opposition, losses. Divine wisdom and divine love have found this to be the best way to final success. The same plan governs our own work for the good of souls. If we meet with no difficulty, suffer no disappointment, experience no loss or setback in our own spiritual life and in the work for souls, we may seriously doubt whether we are doing God's work. On the contrary, the cross is always a sign of divine approval and an earnest that we shall

meet with success in the end, though frequently not in the form which we expected.

After the first attempts in spiritual life, people often begin to be anxious about their "not making any progress." If they are reasonably conscientious in their prayers, their daily work, the observance of their rule of life and the practice of mortification, that anxiety is not only useless, but harmful. It does not spur men on to better efforts nor give them greater courage in the service of God, but it paralyzes their souls and begets in them that dangerous feeling that they are bad. This is not the humility of really saintly persons, who look at their faults in an altogether different light, as is explained in another place, nor is it genuine zeal for progress. We must do our duty day after day and not waste time in worrying about our progress. For our advancement is always worked out along lines very different from what we expect, just as our life's course is never what we plan it to be.

III. THE FIRST DECISION. Three times salvation is offered to Judea before the public appearance of Our Lord and three times it is rejected, each time through the fault of the mighty ones in Judea. Herod the Great is the first to drive Christ away, but Jerusalem is not blameless. Its fear of the cruel monster paralyzes it; and yet, were its inhabitants more deeply imbued with the religion of their fathers and less immersed in their temporal welfare, they would accompany the pious strangers (Magi) and try to obtain certain knowledge about an event that is of utmost importance to them.

Upon Christ's return from Egypt it is Archelaus

who drives Him away from Judea the second time. While we may not blame the Jews directly for this loss of grace, they are not altogether free from blame in as much as they acknowledge the Idumean family as their rulers and make common cause with it.

When Christ is driven away the third time by the betrayal of the Baptist, the guilty ones are the leaders of the nation, the Pharisees and Sadducees. It is true that St. John has by his vigorous sermons and open rebukes of the leaders considerably reduced their influence over the common people; nevertheless, it is official Judea that ruins him and expels the Savior.

In spite of all this, Christ tries to save not only Galilee which is more hospitable, but Jerusalem and Judea. Time and time again He will appear as guest in the Holy City: on every feast day He will be there, and His greatest manifestations will be made in the Temple. With full justice will He be able to say on Palm Sunday: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children as the hen doth gather her chickens, and thou wouldst not" (Matt. 23,37).

*Applications* 1). Christ has not changed since those days. If we examine our own life, we shall find how frequently He has experienced from us a similar indifference in small and even in important matters, perhaps even a blunt refusal. But let us take to heart the warnings which St. Matthew addresses in his gospel to the Jews. The first

act of indifference and the first resistance to Our Lord must not be an omen of our future attitude, as was the case with the Jews. For them the warning of the Evangelist was fruitless. Their faults led them to the murder of the Son of God and their punishment, whose effects last to this very day, is a terrible example of Divine Justice. May it serve as a warning to us to be very serious about everything concerning Christ and our soul. May it make us ever attentive to the voice of the Good Shepherd; and may it prevent every hostile power, typified in Herod, Archelaus, the Pharisees and Sadducees, from obtaining any influence over our heart. Christ, even when poor, humble, persecuted, rejected, must have our undying and unwavering loyalty and love. In other words let us follow the apostle who says: "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3,8).

2) Here we see again the infinite love of Christ, whom no ingratitude, no insult, no coldness can move to lessen His love for men, even for ungrateful Israel. He has not changed since the days when He lived in the land of Zabulon and Nephthalim, appearing as a mere guest in that city and temple which by God's order and the intention of pious forefathers were built for Him. How then can we have any reason to distrust Him? He loves us and even after our faults and coldness is still ready to love us. Let us be sorry for our faults, but not despondent, and let us try to carry out what we so often pray for: "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto Thine."

3) In all this we have also a splendid proof of the love of the Eternal Father and the greatest motive for confidence in Him. The apostle says: "He that spared not even his own Son: but delivered him up for us all: how hath he not also with him given us all things?" (Rom. 8,32). It was for our best interests that God made Him appear in lowliness. He spared Him not during all the time of His mortal career. Long before He had Him expire on the cross, He made Him suffer a social and moral death in those endless persecutions which He permitted to fall upon Him. It is also for our best interests when the Father has His Son demand of us sacrifices that are very painful to nature. We may well exclaim with St. Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . in whom you shall greatly rejoice if now you must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations: that the trial of our faith may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1,3.6.7).

COLLOQUY. Acts of atonement for our neglect of graces; profession of loyalty to Christ; petitions for help and light to see the graces God offers us, and for strength to accept them and co-operate with them.

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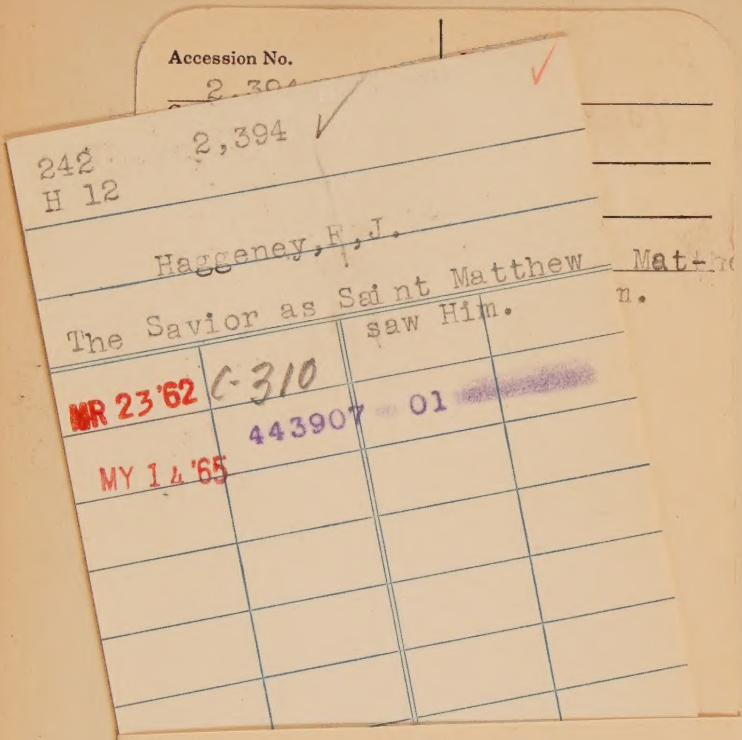


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